

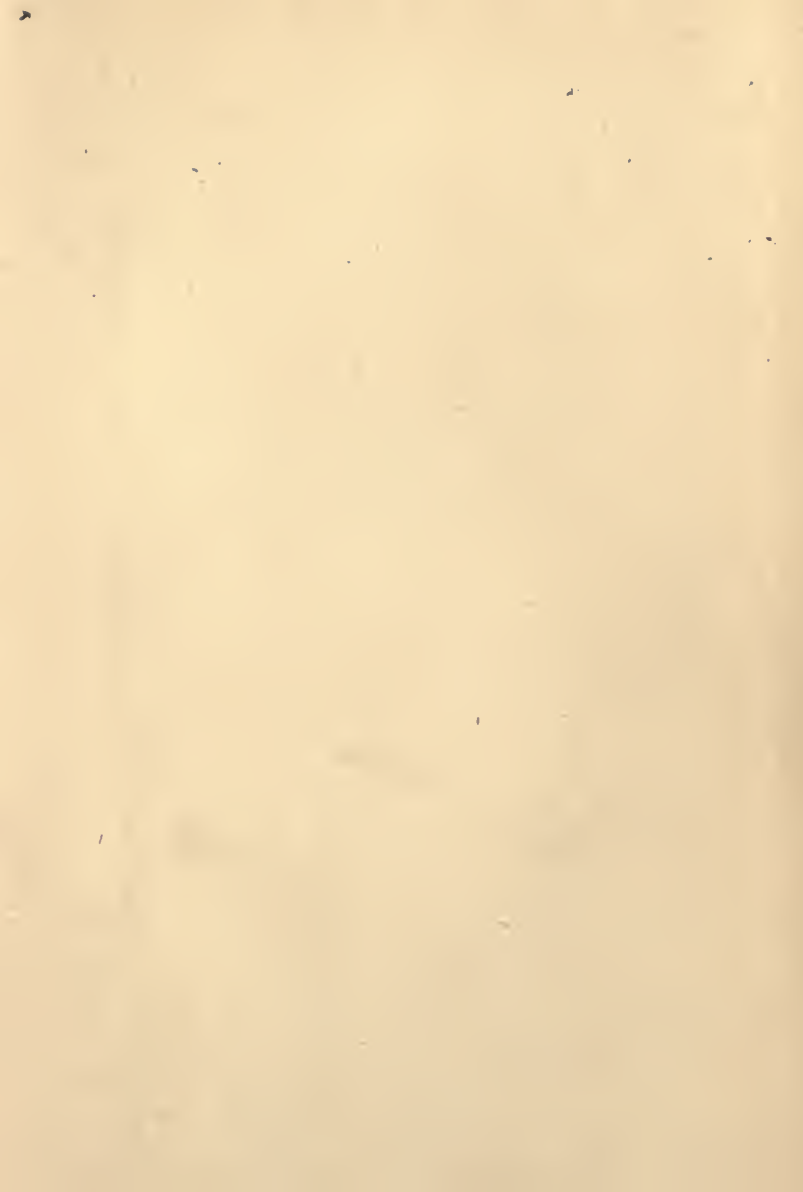
# IN THE HOUSE OF HER FRIENDS



*Bertrand Smith*

*Acres of Timber*

*140 Pacific Ave.*





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HER FRIENDS



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To Katherine

The form and matter of this book is at once  
sacrificed and dedicated



IN THE HOUSE OF  
HER FRIENDS





# IN THE HOUSE OF HER FRIENDS

## I

**S**YLVIA came in from the garden and flung open all the parlor windows to let in the spring. The memory of the winter was so recent that she felt something of license, almost defiance in the act; but nothing resulted from it except the mildest zephyrs smelling of young green things growing in the woods, and the acrid smoke of dead grass burning on the college campus.

She took her old accustomed place in one of the broad window-seats and looked out. Everything about her seemed freed from fetters and rejoicing in a new liberty. Some collegians were playing ball on the Athletic Field, others were loitering on the chapel steps or sprawling in heaps on the brown grass under the elm trees of the Promenade. Some children passed the window with their hands full of wild-flowers from the college woods. Sylvia had seen them last, wrapped like little red mummies, skating up and down an ice-bound puddle in front of the house, but now they were walking lightly in fluttering garments in a sort of visible celebration of the spring. She stopped them and spoke to them as they went by, in renewal of the easy,

human intercourse which had lain dormant under the long frost of the season that was just past.

The door of one of the buildings at the other end of the campus opened and shut with a click as the tall figure of the professor of engineering came out of his recitation room. He stood a moment to withdraw his key from the lock and then came slowly across the grass, so lately freed from snow-drifts, walking with the swing of a cavalry officer and taking the short cut to his own house, which brought him, in the course of time, past Sylvia's window.

There he stopped and took off his soft felt hat, lingering to talk a few moments in the flattering sunlight of the spring afternoon, and Sylvia, smiling down into his handsome narrow face, and noticing the flecks of gray in his dark waves of hair, and the clouded look in his blue, heavy-lidded eyes, knew that the winter had gone hard with him and forbore to ask after his wife.

Sylvia had known him all her life; he was, in fact, part of the furniture of her existence, to be taken for granted without criticism; but when she first remembered him he had no wife. He had lived alone in the house next her grandfather's and hardly a day of all her little girlhood had passed without the sight of his tall, soldierly figure, now sitting on the front steps with her mother in the long summer evenings, while her brother Tom and she ran races up and down the shadows of the elm trees on the green, now in the little walled garden in the rear, where his long arms were especially useful to reach the higher branches of the cherry tree or to help in the training and clipping of

the climbing plants on the chapel wall. But most often during the winter evenings with her mother and grandfather in the old Dean's study, where, as she grew older, she had been vaguely influenced, vaguely enlightened, by the kind of talk that went on about her.

Yet there had been another side to her memories of Wilfred Cochran, a something wordless and shadowy, so dim that it was almost like a dream. It seemed as if more than once in her little girlhood there had been a closed carriage rolling late at night into the silent college inclosure, and she must have seen, or the words of her nurse telling it to some one the next morning had affected her so vividly that she thought she had seen, something dark and helpless lifted out and supported up the steps of Professor Cochran's house. No one had ever told her what it meant. Nevertheless she had long retained the impression then received of hidden tragedy and disgrace, all the more mysterious because so ill understood, nearly effaced at last for lack of reinforcement, until the time, not much more than two years ago now, when Professor Cochran had disappeared suddenly, just before the Easter holidays, and for several weeks no one, not even the Dean, had known where he was.

Then, only from the deep anxiety and preoccupation at home, the rage of conjecture and discussion which seemed to be going on everywhere except at home, she had learned all she was able to understand of Wilfred's hidden struggle against hereditary tendency, his bitter failures, his long abstinence, his last defeat.

He came back in the course of time. Sylvia, as the

Dean's granddaughter, did not hear the storm of censure which greeted his reinstatement in the little society of which he was retained a member, but she could clearly remember how surprised and excited every one was to hear that he had been married during his absence. At first she herself had been a little offended, and then very much interested in picturing to herself what this new Mrs. Cochran might be like, who had come to be their next-door neighbor. But Mrs. Cochran had turned out to be a very strange, undesirable sort of person, who kept herself hidden away and seldom was seen by any one. Her husband, too, had ceased to be found among his old friends. He never came any more into the Dean's walled garden, or sat with them on the steps in the twilight, or spent long pleasant evenings talking to the Dean in his study. Weeks passed sometimes and Sylvia did not see him; but as she had formerly accepted his presence as one of the necessary details of her life, so she had adapted herself to his entire withdrawal with a dreamy, youthful egotism which kept her in a half imaginary world of her own, content to let all that part of the show of life that did not vitally concern her go and come without question, almost without notice.

Yet she was glad to see Professor Cochran again as he stopped under her window, and she quickly resumed the little familiar manner which belonged to their former relations with one another, when she had known herself to be a favorite, and had always been able to make him laugh by telling him what she was thinking about. They were laughing together quite like old

friends, when Sylvia, as she looked down upon him from above, saw a sudden enlargement and intensity in the expression of his eyes, a lifting of the head, a change in the whole man, so significant, so remarkable, that she had it on the tip of her tongue to ask what he was looking at. Just at that moment, however, she felt the touch of a hand upon her shoulder, and, turning, saw that her mother had come into the room so quietly as to leave her unaware of her presence until she perceived her close beside her in the window.

“O mamma,” she said, turning eagerly, “See, everything can be open again!”

“Yes, the winter is over.” Mrs. Lawrence’s voice sounded very low and grave after her daughter’s sweet, high treble. “The winter is over.” She said it again, smiling down at Wilfred Cochran, as a sort of greeting, a magical repetition of what all the creatures in the world were repeating to one another with promise, with encouragement.

But he, seeing her again standing there above him, with the reflection of the beauty of spring upon her face, hearing her beloved and familiar voice as she spoke to him—Wilfred Cochran could only feel a more despairing sadness, a more helpless regret that for him the loosening of the winter’s bonds could bring no lightness, could mean nothing, nothing but the added consciousness of galling chains which already held him fast. He stood silent, gazing up at her, his eyes dim and anguished with the strain of the one thing which was not denied him. Sylvia, too, was looking up smiling into her mother’s face. She loved its clear outline,



the blue eyes which looked out with a sort of poignant beauty from under their perfect arches, the sweet curves of the lips, which seemed cold till she smiled as she was doing now.

Katherine Lawrence stood very quiet under the double gaze of those two widely dissevered beings who both loved her, while caring nothing for each other. But after her first smile of greeting, during all the interchange of cold little words which must be spoken to bridge over long winter months of silence and solitude, she kept her own eyes with almost shrinking care far away upon the faint greens and browns of the spring landscape.

Sylvia at last, half-involuntarily, turned to follow that wide gaze out to the glimpses of distant mountains under the arching trees.

All at once she began to flutter and preen herself and her eyes to dance with new gay interest as she caught sight of a youth in knickerbockers (it was before the days of "safeties") who suddenly swept past the corner and began to flash in and out among the tree trunks of the Promenade. Now he disappeared behind the gray buildings to come into view again on the brow of the hill where the library stood, square and ungraceful, with its ugly squat tower; and now he turned with a birdlike sweep into the straight white path which must soon lead him by their window.

"Mamma, here is Stephen," she whispered with her hand on her mother's arm, just in time before he glided up at their very side, catching at the window-

sill to support and steady himself as he brought his machine to a stand-still.

"Don't let me drive you away, Professor," he shouted in his cheerful young voice, as Wilfred Cochran stepped aside to keep from being run over.

"Thank you, I wouldn't, if I did not happen to be going already," the other responded sharply, his face growing scornful in the impatient intolerance which had always been his for "braggart youth," as he was wont to call it, and which he veiled too slightly ever to be very popular with his students.

But the new-comer, a big, handsome fellow, with a square chin cleft in the middle, and seal-brown, smiling eyes, which he used like a woman, was too confident of himself and the kind intentions of every one round him to be offended by the other's ungraciousness.

"I saw the window open." His voice, too, was touched with the triumph of spring.

"Yes, everything can be open again; isn't it nice?" echoed Sylvia.

"Good-by," said Wilfred abruptly. The boy and girl, openly absorbed in one another, hardly heard him, hardly saw him go. But Katherine's eyes came back to his for a moment just as he turned away. For one grave moment their gaze met.

Then he went on down the path past the chapel to his own house.

## II

THE evening closed chill after the withdrawal of the setting sun. The pale April moon rose like a ghost among the leafless trees, higher and higher above the cold white mist which had rolled up the valley when the sun set, silvering the roofs and filling the dark quadrangles of Littel College, lending a sort of classic dignity to the barren lengths of gray stucco wall which began to glimmer at her bidding into vague colonnades and stately lines of dim white arches. But there was a certain witchlike quality to her radiance which seemed in the end to chill the magic of the spring which had been working so beneficently all day in the sunlight, till it took forms no longer wholly kind, no longer harmless and beautiful. For, as the evening advanced, on the pale whiteness of the Promenade there came by ones and twos, from among the buildings, several dark, muffled, bat-like creatures, who fluttered for a little while up and down among the trees, now gathering in a little group at the end of the walk—commonly called the Dean's corner—now separating again, and finally vanishing as suddenly and mysteriously as they had come. It was nothing more at first than Mrs. Brauer, the wife of the professor of physics, and her great crony, Miss Mix, creeping along together on



their way to the South Gate, where lay Miss Mix's road home into the town. But the moonlight lent something fantastical, almost malicious, to the two figures as they went along, now swaying close together in the deeper interests of their conversation, now drifting far apart with the shock of recoil.

Mrs. Brauer, her narrow shoulders enveloped and her thin arms folded tight together over a large blanket shawl, carried her little shrunken body thrown well back upon her hips and moved with the swinging deliberate gait of a very large woman. Miss Mix went hurrying by her side on her short, fat legs, bouncing away like a rubber ball whenever her somewhat unsteady steps brought her in collision with her companion. Their tongues wagged pleasantly in the magical moonlight; the promise of the spring that had been in the air all day had got in their veins too. It stirred in their impoverished imaginations; it gave new activity to their small intelligences. In the weird moonlight the old tales and surmises about the under history of Littel College, the scandals of the past and the mysteries of the present, assumed a new enchantment, made new demands to be stirred up, repeated, rehabilitated.

And so, like well-intentioned witches (Miss Mix, especially, being one of the kindest creatures in the world) they wove their futile spells out of the web of other lives, and brewed their pot of boiling gossip over their crackling fire of talk. The red light which shone out through unshuttered windows at the Dean's corner added new fuel to the blaze.

"The Lawrences seem to be having company," re-

marked Mrs. Brauer dryly as they came nearer and nearer.

"Oh, no one but Stephen Dullas," said Miss Mix officiously. "I saw him going up the street just about tea time; and later, as I passed the Lawrences' on my way to Patty Cochran's, I caught a glimpse of him with Sylvia near the window."

"He is there everlastingly, isn't he?" said the other. "I'll be bound Mrs. Lawrence is glad to see it. He would be a fine match for Sylvia. She has as good an eye for the main chance as other people, for all she gives herself such superior airs."

"She was always like that, even as a chit of a girl when Tom first brought her here to be head of the Dean's household in place of the old lady. Dear old Mrs. Lawrence! She was gone before ever you came here, Mrs. Brauer. It was a very different house in those days. No such stiff, formal doings as there are now. This having to ring at the bell and wait for the servant-girl to open the door every time you drop in on the way by. Open house and open heart, I say; and you had only to look at the old lady to believe it. The Dean has never been the same man since she was taken. But I was always thankful she went before Tom did. You never knew Tom Lawrence, Mrs. Brauer. He was drowned trying to save the railroad bridge when it was carried away by the high water in '71, a year before your husband was called here. The merriest, warmest-hearted fellow in the world, always ready for a laugh and a joke, but I never could get on with his wife, though I tried hard enough, goodness

knows, if only for Tom's sake. So anxious he was for his old friends to make much of her. But she was always stiff and offish, just as she is now, and as cold as a stone."

"Perhaps it is just as well he died when he did," Mrs. Brauer ventured tentatively, but Miss Mix did not perceive the underlying malice of the suggestion.

"I don't know. They say all is for the best, but it is hard to believe that of everything that happens to us. Everybody loved him. I declare there wasn't a dry eye in the town on the day of his funeral. Everybody was pitying her, left a widow at twenty-two with two little fatherless babies. We all thought she never would have lifted her head again. Well, I suppose she considered it her duty to bear up for the sake of her children, but I remember how it struck me the first time I saw her in her widow's weeds. She was in the Dean's garden. I don't suppose she expected any one to come in upon her, but I thought afterward how strange it was that she should be at work among her flowers again as if nothing had happened. Before I knew what I was about, the tears were streaming down my cheeks, and I was sobbing like a child, for I loved Tom Lawrence like a brother. And she standing there, answering as calmly as if she were a stick or a stone! I said then and I say now, I won't deny she does her duty as she sees it, I won't say she hasn't been a good mother to Tom's children, but you never can convince me that any one has a warm heart who never shows it."

The other responded with an ill-concealed flier. "I know it is as much as one's soul is worth in this

college to say the least thing in blame of Mrs. Lawrence, but I must confess I can't understand how she suits it with her conscience to neglect Patty Cochran as she does. Coming a stranger as she did among us, and such a sick woman as she has been all this year. It is a lonely life at best, but it would have been far worse for Patty if she had had to depend on Mrs. Lawrence for neighborly kindness."

Miss Mix replied with some humor: "I am not so sure that was entirely her fault. I don't believe Patty ever made her very welcome. You see from the very first Mrs. Lawrence was one of the people she couldn't abide."

"And no wonder! Do you remember the first Sunday he brought her to church, and took us all by surprise, he had been so sly and secret about it? Even the Dean was just as much surprised as any one else. That I know from what he let fall afterward to Brauer. And for all she carried it off with a high hand, it must have been a fine come-down to Mrs. Lawrence. You know there never was a day that he wasn't there about the house, 'like a tame cat,' Brauer used to say. And no reason why not, if he liked it. But the next minute, without any warning, to see him walking up the church steps with his wife on his arm!"

"Yes, poor Patty! How daunted she looked with all the new faces. I can see it as if it were yesterday."

"And Mrs. Lawrence came out afterward with the boy and the girl, one on each side of her, and went past Cochran and his wife as they stood in the porch as if she didn't see them. But she came back when she

heard what every one was saying. 'Aren't you going to present me to your wife, Wilfred?' she said in that high and lofty tone of hers, sweet enough to kill you, calling him by his Christian name, too, right before Patty's face. And as if that was not enough to set any woman against her, what must she say next to Patty herself, but 'I hope your husband has told you what a good friend of his I am,' or something of that sort. Poor Patty stood there not knowing what to answer. I could have told my lady that wasn't the wisest thing to say to a young bride. Patty Cochran couldn't endure her from that moment, and I'm sure I don't wonder."

"Patty has no call to complain," said Miss Mix comfortably. "She is the one that got him. And for my part I always had a sneaking suspicion that Kitty Lawrence cared more for Cochran than she ever let on."

Mrs. Brauer replied sharply, "She lost him then, while she was making up her mind."

"And it's women like Patty who are the ones to stand by a man when he is down in the world, as Cochran is now."

Mrs. Brauer assented, carried away straightway into this new theme. "It is getting worse and worse, Brauer tells me, in the college. Half the time he does not know what he is doing in his recitation-room, and at the last faculty meeting he was so evidently under the influence of liquor that it was a shame the Dean did not notice it."

By this time they had reached the Dean's corner again and were hesitating whether to turn back or to



continue their way on to their destination, when a third shape came out into the moonlight of the Promenade, emerging so suddenly from the deep shadow of the big dormitory as to take the others quite by surprise, till Miss Mix recognized the tall, thin figure in the fluttering black cloak.

"Is that you, Nannie Chandler?"

"How do you do, Mrs. Brauer? How are you, Harriet?" said the new-comer in a pleasant, hurried voice. "I was on my way to see how Mrs. Cochran was this evening. I hear she has been ill again, poor woman! Do you know anything about it?"

Miss Mix wished no better than to produce all her store of well-furnished knowledge on the subject. It was some time before the little cluster under the elm tree separated again into its component parts. The white moonlight gave meantime a kind of grotesque significance, a fluttering uncertainty, to their tentatives toward departure, as if some unseen and hidden force held them mysteriously together. Till the latest comer disengaged herself with a swift, almost fugitive movement which carried her quite across the strip of road between the elm tree and the Dean's front door. She did not stop, indeed, till she had reached the last of the two low steps before the entrance, looking back then only to wave good-by to her late companions; but they had already disappeared into the deep encroaching shadow of the buildings beyond.

The door swung open lightly in her hand and she entered with no lack of confidence, evidently, in the welcome that awaited her beyond.

### III

THE occupants of the spacious old drawing-room were all so absorbed in their own affairs that Mrs. Chandler stood for several minutes on the threshold before any one perceived her. Sylvia sat in one corner of the old-fashioned sofa with its high back and broad, cushioned arm, Stephen quite at the other end, a gay array of cards lying between them in the complicated arrangement of the game they were playing.

She was quivering and sparkling with the joy of contest, the color deep in her cheeks like a wild rose, and her eyes full of the liquid light of childhood, delighted, evidently, because Stephen was getting the worst of it. At the other end of the room a great, long legged boy sprawled upon the rug preparing his Greek lesson for the next day. In the circle of light under the lamp stood a little work-table, and a chair from which some one had evidently just risen, leaving a mass of soft knitting behind. But other occupancy of the room there was none, though the sound of voices came through the open folding doors beyond—a man's voice chiefly, somewhat husky from old age, but still beautiful in many of its notes.

Mrs. Chandler spoke herself at last.

“How do you do, Sylvia? Where is your mother?”

The two youths sprang to their feet, and Sylvia cried: “Oh Mrs. Chandler, I can’t get up! If I do I shall spill my cards. She is in the other room with grandfather. Mamma!” She raised her voice and called aloud with scant ceremony.

The mistress of this pleasant, peaceful interior appeared at her daughter’s call in the opening between the folding doors, and stood for a moment looking out questioning, almost startled, as if she had been not unconscious of the venomous foam of talk beating upon her from outside, as if she were on guard against its possible invasion of her remote tranquillity. But she put away her little hostile manner and came forward with a cordial smile when she recognized Mrs. Chandler.

“O Nannie, is it you? I might have known you would have come drifting in with the first days of spring, like a bird from the South.”

Mrs. Chandler, with her extreme thinness, her long, slender, aquiline nose, and wide-open eyes, set in dark, arched hollows, and her fluttering black cloak, did not look unlike a bird as she advanced farther into the room at the other’s bidding, with a certain hesitation, however, as if she had come only to perch a moment and then fly on.

“It is too late! I really can’t stay; I was coming by and saw that your curtains had not been drawn—oh, you haven’t put them up again after the spring cleaning. But I must run on.”



“Oh, no. Stay a little while,” said Katherine, taking up her knitting and sitting down in the circle of lamplight again. “It isn’t late.”

In this little place of her very own, with her children, and the youth who, loving her daughter, enclosed her in the same circle of affectionate sentiment and admiration, with her familiar friend, into whose intimacy she had come through long years while they had sat together watching their children grow up, surely she might put aside the grave, almost repellant reserve which is often the only protection of natures too sensitive, too fastidiously shrinking, to go quite unarmed among their fellow-men, though she might have remembered that best friends often partake enough of the nature of enemies to serve as hybrid links to conduct shocks which might otherwise have missed their victim.

“I ought to have been at home long ago,” hurriedly continued Mrs. Chandler, “but I have been standing under the trees at the corner talking to Harriet Mix and that horrid little Mrs. Brauer, I don’t know how long. They were telling me——”

“Have those two begun to walk up and down again?” interrupted Katherine in a tone between amusement and disgust.

“Yes. Well, they were saying——”

“Oh, don’t let us begin so soon about what they were saying!” cried the other almost pathetically.

“Dear me!” exclaimed Mrs. Chandler, “you are always so superior to a little harmless gossip.”

“It is only an instinct against taking liberties with other people’s affairs which I should resent in my own.”

“My dear, we can’t keep people from talking about us.”

“It is only an instinct. Considerations of that kind would not be likely to affect it.”

“Besides,” went on the other, too full of the story which had just been poured into her ears to be long diverted from the pleasure of its discussion. “Besides, I don’t think you are quite fair in your judgment of those two women. Mrs. Brauer, I admit, is a venemous little toad. I should always suspect her of some mean motive if I found her putting herself out for any one. But Harriet Mix is the kindest-hearted, most helpful creature in the world, dear old Dr. Mix’s daughter, and her mother was the salt of the earth. She has her faults, as we all have. I know she is a terrible mischief-maker and busybody when the occasion offers itself, but where can you find a person more ready to spend and be spent than Harriet is when any one is in trouble? For instance, which of us, Kitty, would have sat up for two nights, as she has this last week, with that poor woman, Mrs. Cochran, because she was alone and there was no one else to do it? I don’t know about you, but I am sure I haven’t been once this winter even to ask how she was.”

“I hardly know Mrs. Cochran,” said Katherine coldly, “and she has never shown any signs of wanting to know me any better. Even if I had known she was ill, which I did not, I can’t think of any way I could have offered my services to her that she would not have resented.”

The other woman assented instantly.

"I know, I know; she is perfectly impossible, and it is ridiculous to pretend anything else. Mrs. Brauer, for instance, with her airs of championship for a young, neglected wife!"

"You are so funny," said Katherine, with a hurried change of subject, "with your extravagant prejudice against that poor woman. I rather like the Brauers myself. They used to come here a good deal at one time. He was very much interested in my portfolio of French photographs, and I found him quite touching in his belated love of art and his desire to collect a library."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Chandler, giggling, as if suddenly amused by some thought that had occurred to her, "I have no doubt you were very kind to them both, but with that sort of people one is easily misunderstood. In fact I happen to know that your manner to her husband has given Mrs. Brauer a good deal of uneasiness. She thought it too familiar to a married man. Not that she thought you meant anything by it really, or that she minded it herself, she assured me, but she feared with people who didn't know you well it would lay you open to criticism."

"My manner to Mr. Brauer!" echoed Katherine in such wide amazement that they both began to laugh involuntarily. But long before the other had ceased to be amused, Katherine drew her shoulders together with a shrinking gesture as if the whole subject had become distasteful to her.

"How impossible it is to be prepared for what they

will think of you!" she said a little bitterly, as she took up her knitting again.

"But, Kitty, I know you hate to talk about it," continued Mrs. Chandler, drawing her chair nearer and lowering her voice. The fumes of the pot that had been boiling so hotly out in the moonlight over its little fire of crackling thorns were still constraining her, against her better judgment, in spite of discouragement, to return to the college scandal that she knew must be peculiarly unacceptable to any member of the Dean's household, most unfit for discussion almost within earshot of the Dean himself.

"I am not speaking merely for the sake of retailing gossip. But don't you think we have some responsibility in this matter of the Cochrans. If all reports are true—I am not only taking what Harriet Mix says—he neglects her shamefully; she is most unhappy. I suppose she deserves it. I suppose it is no more than she might have expected."

Katherine was silent. The other continued, with a sudden change of position.

"And after all what ever is going on there, however he treats her, I am a great deal sorrier for him than for her. It has shut him entirely away from his friends. No one ever sees him now except as he goes to and fro to his recitation-room, unless it is you." She turned suddenly upon Katherine, who answered briefly, "Never," without looking up from her knitting.

"All these reports are growing against him from day to day. No one exactly accepts them, but nobody

denies them. It seems to me heartless that all his old friends should dismiss it all as you do, as if you hadn't the slightest interest in the matter."

"That is not true, I have an interest," said Katherine faintly. With evident effort, after a moment she resumed: "What good does it do to listen to the vulgar surmises and conjectures of people like Miss Mix and Mrs. Brauer, who, however well-intentioned, must, from the very bias of their minds, desecrate everything they touch? I know nothing, I can do nothing. What is the use of talking about it? How can his friends help him by making his misfortunes the subject of endless humiliating discussion?"

"Oh, well, my dear," the other began in tones of some impatience, when an indignant voice at the door made them both look up.

"Mamma! You here! I have been all the way to Miss Mix's to look for you."

It was Marjorie Chandler, a very pretty brunette about Sylvia's age, with soft, amorous brown eyes, strongly curling dark hair, and round red lips which curved charmingly over brilliant teeth. Sylvia sprang up to greet her friend.

Mrs. Chandler rose to her feet in a sort of comical deprecation of her daughter's anger; the Dean himself, a notable figure, more than six feet tall, with a fine head, and a shock of gray hair falling about his ears, came out of the inner room at the sound of the new arrival.

Marjorie was a great favorite of his and he turned at once, with old-fashioned gallantry, to defend her



from her mother, who, quickly recovering from the disadvantage of her own discovery in an apparent lapse from duty, had begun to upbraid her.

"You naughty child! Do you mean to say you have been all the way down to Miss Mix's by yourself at this time of night?"

Marjorie accorded the Dean one of her brilliant smiles, but a veil of blankness descended over her soft brown eyes as she turned them on her mother.

"I thought I should meet you every moment," she said softly.

"Well, come along now. We must go at once. Your father will be waiting to shut up the house," said Mrs. Chandler, drawing her long black cloak around her. "Oh, what a night!" she cried as they all went to the door with her. "Why not walk part of the way back with us?"

"Let us all go!" cried Sylvia. "Look at the moon; it is as big as the dome of the capital."

"Are you mad, young people?" said the Dean in his rolling old voice. "Don't you know it is only April and there is rheumatism in the air lying in wait to catch the unwary?"

"Only to the corner, sir," said his daughter-in-law respectfully; but he would not risk the night damps and went back to his study, shuffling a little in his leathern slippers, and quite sure they were all sorry to go off without him.

Marjorie at once slipped to Sylvia's side and put her hand clingly within her friend's arm.

"O Sylvia," she whispered, "I have seen him

again! He was still downstairs in the parlor at Miss Mix's when I came in to look for mamma, and he talked to me for quite a while."

"Did he?" cried Sylvia, much interested. "What did he say?"

"Oh, I can't tell you! Nothing really much, you know, but very nice. He has the most beautiful eyes in the world. Don't you think so? And he looked at me all the time he was talking in the most peculiar way. O Sylvia!" She squeezed her friend's arm and sighed ecstatically.

The moon was still filling everything with its misty light and gave the effect of an incantation to the warm young voice murmuring in Sylvia's ear. She felt vaguely confused and excited. Something was going on in the world all round her, in the very earth under her feet. Her youth demanded that she should be a part of it, else what good was there, what reason for the beauty of the great pale moon and the brown, fragrant earth, and for the little damp breeze blowing from the woods and smelling of wild-flowers. Stephen walked at her other side, but she was not in the habit of considering him an especially illuminating person. What he had for her just then was not at all what she wanted; it was too obvious, too simple, quite unadapted to the faint flutterings and stirrings of her half-awakened emotions, which had been aroused into vague self-consciousness by the spring moonlight. She continued to turn him her shoulder and go on listening to Marjorie.

At the corner they parted, Tom, not quite by his

own intention, accompanying Mrs. Chandler and her daughter the rest of their way home, Stephen to his boarding-house, and Sylvia and her mother back to the Dean's. Soon everything was silent and solitary again. The moon rode now in the very heights of the heavens, but her splendor had summoned the mists from all quarters of the heavens. With long black veils and streamers they began to pour themselves across her face. For a time she could withstand them and shone out gallantly again and again in all her earlier glory, but as she passed the zenith of her power they more and more encompassed her, and her setting was buried in dense clouds.



## IV

IT was the regular Thursday meeting of the faculty at Littel College and all the professors were assembled in the treasurer's office, a large corner room in the science building, smelling a little of the chemical solution which preserved the biological specimens next door.

On one side the windows looked out toward the smooth campus of the main quadrangle with its fringe of elms, still leafless, while all the other trees were beginning to put on their spring foliage. In the other direction the view was less extended, being shut in by the back side of the chapel and the Dean's walled garden, invisible from the road, but showing all its sun-drenched, bright enclosure to any one who chose to look across from the higher elevation of the science building.

Wilfred Cochran sat leaning back in a chair by the window, his long legs stretched out in front of him, his head bent forward, one hand supporting his elbow while the other deeply shaded his heavy eyes, apparently entirely oblivious of what was going on about him. If his colleagues looked at him at all it was askance, with contemptuous or curious glances, as if wondering how far he was himself this afternoon. Far too much himself he would have answered, if he had

spoken the thoughts that were devouring him; far too conscious of himself and all which that included.

Within the rim of his fingers he could see from where he was sitting a brilliant picture, focussed sharply by the hollow shadow; held, as it were, within his hand, yet far remote, almost magical, in its brightness and perfection. In it he saw the figures of Mrs. Lawrence, Sylvia, and Tom sitting among the flowers in the Dean's garden. He could see Sylvia spring to her feet and begin to flit about the walks, leaving Tom, his flexible young back bent like a bow over his book, still on the bench beside his mother. He watched the distant pantomime which told him how she was begging her mother to come and see something she had discovered among the box rows, how Katherine resisted, hesitated, but finally was persuaded to rise from her seat. Then he saw them both bend to examine some small object among the sharp red flames of the tulips. At last Katherine stood erect again and Sylvia, springing upon what was evidently some little plant which had met with her disapproval, and for whose destruction she had gained consent, tore it up by the roots and flung it over the wall. Tom at last strolled out into the sun, evidently at his mother's bidding, and sprang up with his hands on top of the gray wall to spy out the result of Sylvia's lawless action.

There was no harm done for they all laughed a little and then went back to their seats in the luminous shade. It was nothing, nothing more than he himself had seen and felt and lived through a thousand times in those days when he still had the right to come and

go in that garden. Such a little time ago it had been so easy. A few long strides among the gray college buildings, his hand on the latch, his shoulder against a stiffly moving gate, and it had all lain open for him, with beloved eyes smiling a sure welcome at the end. The road had grown no longer, the gate would move no more grudgingly on its hinges, and she would always greet him kindly, compassionately, for Lawrence's sake, if for nothing more. Apparently just the same, but different as one of those troubled dreams which, while preserving a semblance of delight, torture the dreamer with the underlying sense of loss and desolation. It was gone from him forever; no hope could flatter him with thoughts of restoration. Forfeited, plucked from him, rather, by an inexorable and pursuing fate, sometime eluded, almost escaped, which had at last outrun him.

With a half-suppressed groan he shut out the little enchanted picture with his hand, and turned his face upon the group inside the dusty room, still dark and cheerless with the winter's chill. This weekly meeting of the faculty was seldom a very friendly occasion, and when Cochran finally brought his attention back to his colleagues he was not surprised to find himself in the midst of a heated, jangling argument. The Dean, always a most informal and arbitrary chairman, looked shaken and agitated. Directly opposite him sat the little group of the opposition, headed by Merritt, the professor of mathematics, a lean, sallow-faced man, with reddish hair and a salient nose and chin. It was he who was speaking when Cochran began to listen,

and his insolent manner to the Dean made the other man's blood boil and his wandering thoughts collect themselves into a longing, whatever the subject under discussion, to prove Merritt in the wrong.

"But the young man, my dear Merritt," the Dean was saying. "Can't we stretch matters a little and give the young man a chance?"

It was one of his weaknesses, inherited no doubt from an earlier less rigorous idea of education, to think that any young man was of more importance than the law and order of the college.

"Quite impossible! Quite impossible!" answered Merritt in his strident voice. "He has a very poor record; besides, this special condition stands over from his junior year."

The old Dean drew his brows together and looked around him. "How does he stand with you, Chandler?" he asked, at last, turning to a little well-brushed gentleman near by, whose softly colored face, framed in fine gray curls and whiskers, looked exquisitely well bred and unofficial between the lean countenances of the men on each side of him.

"Young Dullas," he said now gently. "Yes, yes, yes. A charming fellow. Yes, with me he has done very good work, very promising work."

A hardly disguised mutter and grin of contempt and hard amusement went round the group, betraying the small esteem in which his colleagues held Professor Chandler's courses.

The Dean, however, raised his head with a sort of mild triumph, till the harsh voice of the professor of

mathematics broke in again with ill-concealed impatience.

"All this seems somewhat outside the question, Dean. Whether the fellow has or has not done well in one course does not alter the fact of this condition in another, and until he has passed it off he is not eligible for a degree."

"A degree, a degree," said the Dean, made incautious by his irritation. "But he must get a degree. I promised his father as much when he sent him back to try again."

There was a moment's horrified silence. The faculty conscience was outraged. Professor Merritt threw himself back in his chair and whispered rudely to his neighbor.

"At least," said the Dean, conscious too late of his mistake, "Of course he must meet the requirements."

"But I say that he has not met the requirements," answered Professor Merritt.

The Dean was annoyed and replied, rather crossly, "Possibly not, possibly not, so far, at least; but there is no reason why he should not be helped to meet them. Honorably, honorably, of course," he added testily. Then, seeing a look of disapproval, of opposition, flash from one face to another, he turned with a sort of tacit appeal in his kind old eyes to where Cochran was sitting, still silent, staring straight in front of him. But he did not look up or show any sign of being conscious of anything around him, and the Dean himself had to break the dead, unfriendly silence.

"Suppose the lad has that one condition about



which he can really claim a certain negligence on our part in letting it run on so far without reminding him of it. He stands very well in some of his work. Considering his perseverance and pluck in coming back for a fifth year after all his class had left, to retrieve his failure, to win a degree and please his father——”

“A trustee of the college,” muttered Merritt unpleasantly to his neighbor; but the Dean did not hear him, and concluded, with all the charm and warmth of his beautiful old voice bent to an appeal.

“It seems to me not impossible for us, working together, to find some way——”

But the magnetism and grace of manner, irresistible in its own place, fell fruitless before these unfriendly men, who thought he was using his influence for Stephen because he wished to curry favor with his father, who was a rich man, with power among the trustees. They never would have believed, they were incapable of understanding, a certain quality of generous enthusiasm which, while not utterly indifferent to the material advantages and consequences of an action, glorifies it with a sort of fine optimism and raises it far above mere mercenary calculation.

But here Cochran's voice broke in so unexpectedly among them that it was several seconds before any of them understood what he was saying.

“Why, I thought he was drunk,” whispered Professor Merritt, with a half-sneer, to his companion; but he broke off in a hurry to answer the question suddenly directed against him.

“I didn't know you were teaching physics, Mer-

ritt. I did not know physics was one of your subjects this year."

"It isn't," stammered Merritt in some surprise.

"I thought not. That is what puzzled me at first to hear you talking about Dullas's condition as if it were your own affair. I see now you were just standing by and lending a hand to Brauer to protect him from being come down on for an extra examination."

He spoke with a bravado of good fellowship which neither Merritt nor Brauer knew how to resent. To the others it came as a relief after the long jangle which was prolonging the meeting far beyond its usual length, and they frankly showed their amusement at the insinuation of the real reason of Brauer's unwillingness to oblige the Dean—the laziness of that gentleman in his department being quite well known in Littel College.

Mr. Brauer, a large, slow-moving, middle-aged man, with a square brown beard and a fat face, replied at last somewhat pompously in a mellow, pleasant voice, spoiled by a pretentious accent:

"I shan't refuse him the examination if he asks for it, but it will be a mere waste of time. He didn't know anything about the subject when he finished it, and that was two years ago."

"Time enough for him to forget what he didn't know," remarked a flippant voice from the other end of the room.

"Why don't you hand him over to a tutor?" Cochran continued. "Some man who knows the course and what will be expected of him. That nephew of

yours, Brauer, might turn another honest penny out of it. He is doing a good work in that way already, I believe, with the juniors."

Professor Brauer, who had been rocking gently to and fro on two legs of his chair, looking very smug and pompous in his character of faithful upholder of the college laws, gradually allowed himself to settle firmly on the ground and to say that the matter might possibly be arranged in some such way.

"Well now, well now, very good, very good," said the Dean with great satisfaction. "Shall we call it settled? I shall speak myself to that young nephew of yours, Brauer; put him on his mettle. He is a very promising fellow, I understand, in your department, isn't he, Cochran? We must keep our eye on him. He has his way to make."

"Immoral old cuss!" soliloquized the young tutor whose blue eyes had such an effect on Marjorie Chandler's imagination.

But Cochran cut in hastily with a motion for adjournment before the Dean could further entangle himself.

The assembly, thus suddenly restored to the safe and narrow ways of parliamentary usage, quickly made use of them to dismiss itself.

"I am very grateful to you, Brauer," said Dr. Lawrence, turning to the professor with the gracious manner which the other knew so ill how to receive. "In fact I take this from you as a special favor. I have a personal interest in the young man for his father's sake; it would have greatly annoyed me at this



late day if anything had happened to prevent him from taking his degree."

He glanced across to where Cochran stood upon the steps, as if he would have liked to speak to him too, but the other kept his face turned away, avoiding the chance of meeting his eye; so after a moment, with his usual courtly bow and "Good evening, gentlemen," he joined Professor Chandler, who was waiting for him below, and the two went slowly off together down the path toward the chapel, the Dean towering above his little companion, his loose cloak lending a sort of amplitude to his slender old figure, his fine head bent forward looking on the ground.

Merritt shrugged his shoulders and turned to Brauer.

"He seems to think it is quite settled, doesn't he, after he has once mentioned his personal interest in the matter? Well, I suppose with men trained under his uncle that is the way he would have carried it, but I guess he is beginning to find that this faculty is made of different stuff."

"He can hardly fail to feel it so," remarked Cochran, who had been listening. "I don't see any men among us who take the place Constable did in botany, for instance, or who equal the scholarship of Curtis and Lewis, let us say. We are just a lot of fellows, well trained, perhaps, in our special subjects, moving along the line of preferment which takes us for the time to this small college on our way to more important positions, if we can get them." He laughed a little scornfully. "Of course we are devoted to the college while

we are in it. Our only hope of advancement, in fact, is by keeping it in line with the others, because connection with a second-class institution injures our own chances of advancement."

If there had not been such mordant scorn in the manner of this speech the matter might have gone unchallenged; but "Oh, come now, Cochran," said one of the group who still stood on the office steps, "you needn't take such a high and mighty tone about it!"

It was the head of the classical department who spoke, a pleasant-looking man with rather rigid features, light, curly hair, growing scanty on the temples, and bright, cold blue eyes. "You know there is such a thing as law and a standard. If the dear old Dean had his way the degree conferred by Littel College would be no better than the paper it is written on. I got mine from here and I propose to keep up its value."

Cochran turned upon him with a face like a thundercloud. "My dear fellow, I can perfectly see that to a man of your calibre the value of your degree is of the greatest importance, and I should advise you to keep it up as high as possible by all means in your power. As for you, Brauer," he bent his gaze suddenly on the professor of physics, who was beginning to make his way ponderously down the steps, "as for you, and this matter of Stephen Dullas's condition, the Dean thanks you because it all lies in your hands. Of course, you can give the boy a paper that no man can pass, and just as much of course you can give him one that no man could fail in. Now I would advise you not to let the private spite of another man influence you

in this matter, and if the Dean chooses to take your leniency as a personal favor, why in God's name do a personal favor to a man old enough to be your father, who, in the natural course of things, won't have many more to ask you. Good Heavens, what a hurry you are in—some of you—” He cast an ominous glance at the retreating figure of the professor of mathematics, who, in his haste for the supper his wife was keeping hot for him, was already out of ear-shot. “What a hurry you are in to fill a dead man's shoes, and how little fit any of you are to do it!”

He was already some distance on his way home before Brauer could open his mouth to reply or Brownell had begun to realize that he had been insulted.

It was so like Cochran to flout them in the face of all they knew about him, to challenge their motives and conduct when any one of them could have turned upon him with retorts so obvious as to be almost banal; to sneer at their hard-working incapacity, when any gift of his which might have made him their superior lay in the dust at their very feet. There was something so daring, so insolent about it that it struck them with a sort of unwilling admiration. So Brownell contented himself with saying, “By Jove,” though his blond face grew rather red, and the others only laughed a little and started off peaceably in different directions to supper—that simple evening meal which was still universal in Littelton.

## V

THE Dean felt himself suddenly unusually depressed as he sat down opposite his daughter-in-law at the pretty, old mahogany table, shining with silver and glass. He noticed with a sort of querulous discontent that Sylvia's place was empty. Where was the child?

"Taking supper with the Chandlers," said her mother.

He leaned back in his chair and sank into a trance of meditation, his fingers tapping the table in front of him, his heavy brows knit, his lips pushed out and drawn together in a sort of pout, apparently quite unconscious that every one was waiting his attention before the meal could begin.

"Won't you say grace, sir," said Katherine at last, with a little effort over the inherent shyness which is so apt to reassert itself in any prolonged silence. She would rather not have spoken at all, but Tom's entreating looks, cast toward where she sat behind the tea-urn, as well as the decorously concealed impatience of the white-aproned servant at her side, at last combined to overcome her diffidence.

The Dean started.

"Yes; oh, yes, of course," but he sank immediately afterward into renewed abstraction, hardly noticing the

dishes that were passed to him, and forgetting to drink his tea till it was cold.

Tom, however, made all the haste that was consistent with decency and a good appetite. He was only a Freshman at Littel College, but his class had done him the honor of entrusting him with office. He was the kind of youth who took his responsibilities very seriously and he deeply felt the importance of the business awaiting him this evening. He had been already suffering from the fear of being late, and the moment they rose from table he was preparing to take a hurried departure when he stopped aghast on hearing his grandfather speak to him.

"Halloo! Where are you going so fast, my boy? Down-town? Just wait a moment, I want you to post a letter for me." He went toward his study table.

Tom stood stock-still, not saying a word, but gazing at his mother in dumb entreaty. His grandfather, noticing his silence, looked back quickly.

"Well?" said he.

"Can't Molly take it?" muttered Tom in gruff embarrassment.

The Dean turned upon him with a sudden burst of irritation.

"Molly? No!" he exclaimed. "If I had wanted one of the servants I should have called her in the first place. But that is always the way; a great, strong fellow like you about the house, never willing to do anything for anybody, always trying to shirk any service that is asked you, to put it on some woman. No, sir, don't wait," as Tom silently and with downcast



eyes laid aside his cap and dropped himself into one of the chairs in the study, preparing to assuage his impatience with a little brown book he found at hand upon the table.

"Do you hear me? I don't want you to wait. Go about your business. I can't stand ungracious service. I shall take the letter down myself when it is finished."

"Tom is quite willing to do anything for you, sir, that is necessary, I am sure," Katherine broke in deprecatingly between them, "but it is Thursday night, you know, and there is the Freshman meeting——"

"Oh, if there is any good reason, that makes it a very different matter," said the Dean, quickly mollified. "It is all right, boy. I am sorry I was so short with you. Cut along, cut along."

Though before Tom could disappear, he burst out again with an aftermath of indignation.

"But why didn't you say it out frankly as your father would have done, instead of scowling and hanging your head like a surly dog?"

Tom disappeared without a word.

"I hate an ungracious manner," continued the old man, grumbling, half to himself, half to his daughter-in-law, who had followed him into his study and was trimming his lamp and arranging the materials on his table. "I am sure I don't know where he gets it. It is quite different from his father at his age. My son would have run his legs off for any one at the slightest word, and never stopped to ask if it was necessary."

"Tom hasn't the gift of expression," said Mrs.

Lawrence gently. "I am quite sure he is as ready to help you as his father would have been, but he doesn't know how to say so."

"Oh, I suppose so, I suppose so," said the Dean, letting himself down heavily into his study chair, so that the screw on which it turned groaned with his weight, and beginning to fumble with his knotty, bloodless old fingers among the pens and papers.

"It is like all the young fellows, now a days, always wanting to do everything their own way; no such thing as unquestioning obedience."

His daughter stood looking at him gravely, anxiously, and then with a sort of wistful intensity which brought out all the underlying sadness in her calm young face. She understood too well to resent his causeless burst of irritation against young Tom, and she was too unused to considering her own sensations to be more than dimly conscious how unreasonably she was hurt by it. She was absorbed in a poignant sympathy, almost anguish, for the old man, used to command, used to preëminence, whose power was slipping away from him—that was inevitable, with his advancing years—but whose decay was every day made more painfully evident to himself by the unfriendly criticism and opposition of men who should have been his co-workers; men his inferiors still in genius and generous forces, but strong and pitiless in their youth and the understanding of a generation which had left him behind.

He finished his letter with his usual vigorous, picturesque signature.



“What is the date?” he said, raising his massive old head. “May 3d.” He fell into a fit of musing. “My son Tom’s birthday. He would have been—let me see, six from seven are forty-one. Heigh-ho—I wonder——”

It was not so much a question as a cry of regret and need, the dropping of the cloak which covered from every one, himself most of all, the wounds which daily humiliated his pride. Then his vain old spirit quickly caught his disguises around him again. When he looked up and saw his daughter’s eyes full of tears, he never dreamed that it was for him they were shed.

“Forgive me, my dear. I ought not to have reminded you.”

She smiled faintly and shook her head.

“You must be very tired. It was a very long faculty meeting; I thought it would never end. Was Professor Merritt making himself more than usually disagreeable?”

This remark was provocative and brought forth its customary reply.

“My dear, you misjudge him,” said the Dean, laying himself down very carefully on his long leathern sofa; “he has an unpleasant manner, I grant, and he was rather offensive to-day, I own; unintentionally so, unintentionally, I am sure, in his desire that I should account for the expenditure of your Aunt Sarah’s legacy to the college. You know there was great informality in the way it was left us. Upon my word,” said the old Dean, with a sudden burst of indignation,

"they couldn't have been more insulting if they thought I had stolen it."

"But I don't see how even Professor Merritt can think he has anything to do with the finances of the college," answered Katherine with ironic gentleness.

"Well, you see, some of the trustees have been talking imprudently, and this fellow has got wind of the proposed cut in the salaries. Of course there is nothing yet decided. I, myself, am strongly opposed to it. But something must be done to bring down the expenses. The college is falling behind every year. We feel the competition of the large universities even in the attitude of the alumni. They are more and more transferring their interests and sending their sons and leaving their money to Harvard and Yale. It is a pity, a great pity," concluded the old man with a touch of melancholy, "for there is much to be said in favor of a small college."

"This has never been a small college," said Katherine with soft pride. "In numbers, perhaps, but the men who served it have been great and had great aims."

The Dean was pleased.

"Yes, my dear, there is a great deal of truth in what you say. When I think of Lewis, unapproachable in his subject, to whom any place was open, content to spend the prime of his life here among his boys—and Curtis." The Dean told over the old names one by one.

"What scholarship! What rare and gifted intelligence, and, my dear Kitty, what character! It is there I feel that the men of the present age are lacking.

There is a hardness and coldness, a mercenary spirit, a lack of generous fire and enthusiasm. Perhaps it is because I don't understand them."

His mind went back to the long, quarrelsome meeting of the afternoon.

"And then, you know, dear doctor," said his daughter-in-law, a little mischief showing through her seriousness, "even in those old times, under your uncle, I have heard that his faculty did not always let him do as he wanted."

"Ah, yes!" said the old man with sudden energy, "but those were battles of Titans. I remember once—I had just been appointed to my professorship—there arose a point of difference between my uncle and Dr. Welling. I have forgotten the subject. We young fellows held our breath and listened. Such eloquence, such acumen, such keenness of argument, and such courtesy! Never ruffled for a moment, though the discussion was not without warm feeling on both sides. But any of those men would have given their lives for the college, and their last hour of service to my uncle, without stopping to weigh the cost. Ah!" he sighed, "I suppose it is my own fault that I have not been able to win the same support."

"No," said Katherine, "it is only that you have fallen upon different days. Those older men gave—these men want to gain—distinction in their service of you and the college."

"Ah, well! Ah, well! We won't judge them harshly," said the Dean with kindly optimism. "Some of them are men whose education meant the most stren-

uous self-denial, a constant struggle with small means and poor opportunities. Look at Brauer, for instance, a farmer's lad, who himself supplemented the deficiencies of the country school. And Merritt, the son of a saloon-keeper at Statesburg, whose cleverness won him a scholarship at Yale. They must have their enthusiasms. They must have their ideals, if one could get at them. But Cochran managed them better than I did this afternoon," he concluded with a burst of frankness. "There was a question about the fitness of one of the young men—Stephen Dullas, my dear—for final degrees. It was a small point in itself, but a great deal was made of it. I own I found myself entirely at a disadvantage among them. They had justice on their side, technically," the Dean admitted; "yes, technically, they always do have a certain justice; but Cochran can understand that there are things beyond technical justice. But he is young, he is one of them. He knows where to find them as I do not. It was all perfectly simple afterward."

"Then he was there?" said Katherine very low.

The Dean nodded.

"Yes. I did not speak to him. He did not seem to desire it. I left him talking to the other men on the steps."

There was a pause of a few moments till the Dean began again in a different tone of voice.

"How your husband loved him, Kitty! How he watched over him! It seems strange that all that care and devotion should have been utterly in vain."

Katherine was silent and the Dean went on, half to himself.

"Sometimes I wonder whether I did all I could in that matter."

"He himself thought so," murmured Katherine half-involuntarily.

"Yes, yes, in the past. Perhaps I did, but I mean this last. I sometimes think that if Tom had been alive he would have managed better. The woman was evidently venal, she might have been bought off. But I never quite understood. She and her father evidently thought they had some prior claim on him. It was certainly a marriage, and I could find out nothing to show she was not a perfectly reputable person. I made it very clear how little she could gain by it, but she was dazzled by what she seemed to consider an advance in social position. And then I believe she was attached to him after a fashion."

Katherine put her hand over her eyes and held it clasped across her brows as the Dean went on talking.

"Cochran himself was a difficulty. You know he was always capable of acts of quixotic extravagance. He seemed to feel it was the price he must pay for his fall. If I had known, however," said the Dean, rambling on, "if I could have foreseen. He was not fit then to judge for himself. The price was too great. He ought not to have been allowed to pay it. Ah, Kitty, what a noble nature, but how pitiaibly alloyed! And yet in his deepest falls he always preserved a chastity of spirit. The soul remained clean, however low it was dragged by the body. And even now, when he gives



himself a chance, the fire flashes up again as bright as ever, untainted by the dross it feeds on. But when I think of him as he was, such a little time ago, his powerful, gifted mind—too intolerant and impatient of slow stupidity, perhaps, and yet so gentle and tender with those he loved; his graceful, vivid fancy; his charm of manner; all this, and then to see him as he is now! Ah, Kitty, what a wreck! what a wreck!”

He fell silent. When Katherine at last looked up, with a certain effort, she saw him rapt in anxious thought. For a moment she did not interrupt his musing; then, hearing him sigh:

“Shall I read to you, sir?” she said, and took up the book that lay open on her knee.

In a very little while his regular breathing showed that he had fallen asleep, but she did not move or try to occupy herself otherwise. She sat very quiet, the book lying idle in her lap, her hands clasped above it, sunk in profound and melancholy revery.

## VI

A VOICE came to her softly from the darkened outer room. "Mamma!" It was Sylvia, come home from her party, pausing now on the outer threshold with her usual cry, the insistent demand for welcome after the shortest absence.

Katherine put aside her book and went out to meet her.

"Hush! You will wake your grandfather. Did you have a nice time?"

"Well, let us stay out here, then," said Sylvia, drawing her mother down upon a seat in the hall and taking her place on the last curved step of the stairs at her feet.

"I want to tell you about it. Oh, yes, we had a very nice time, at least I did! Do you know, dear, I was very amusing? That young Mr. Field was there—the new tutor whose eyes Marjorie thinks so beautiful—and I talked, I am afraid I talked a great deal; but they all laughed and encouraged me, and I felt that I was appearing to advantage," she concluded quaintly.

"I sincerely hope you were," replied her mother a little cruelly; "but I am afraid you were being very silly and imprudent."



"Probably I was, but one has to be a little silly to be amusing, and I shall try to forget my imprudences, so as not to worry over them. That is the trouble of having a nice time; it always leaves you so much to repent of. The kind of life I should choose, the kind of life I should like to live, is where everything comes so fast that there is no time to think about it, and consider it, and wonder how one could have done differently. Here one thing follows the other so slowly that it leaves too much time for reprisals—no, that isn't the word."

"I am afraid that is the word," said her mother laughing a little.

"Reflection is what I really meant," concluded Sylvia with dignity. Then, with an abrupt change of subject, she continued:

"Well, what did you do while I was away?"

"Let me see," said her mother, sitting with one elbow on the back of her chair, her head supported against her hand, while she looked down sideways and smiling at Sylvia on the step at her feet. "After you went—" she mused a moment; "I stopped in the kitchen, on my way from the garden, to speak to Lizzie, and before I could get upstairs Stephen came with a great armful of apple-blossoms."

"He could never have got them himself," cried Sylvia unkindly; "he is too lazy."

"Perhaps not, but he brought them himself," remarked her mother, "and stayed while I was arranging them. You will see them to-morrow in the parlor; they look very pretty. Then it was time to get ready

for tea, and Tom and I waited and waited for your grandfather, who was very late—and very tired. After tea he lay on the sofa and I read him to sleep. That is all, I think.”

“Was Stephen sorry I wasn’t there?” asked Sylvia with naïveté.

“He bore it very well,” answered her mother, her smile becoming more amused.

But Sylvia’s high spirits had begun to evaporate. She sat silent a few moments, and when she spoke again her mood had entirely changed.

“Oh, I am so bored!”

Katherine echoed the word with some surprise.

“Why, just now you were very much amused.”

“Oh, yes, that! But I mean really. When am I going to grow up and go away from here and have things happen to me?”

“Things may happen to you here,” said Katherine with a grave smile.

“No,” cried Sylvia extravagantly, “nothing ever happens here! I have lived here all my life long, and nothing has ever happened either to me or any one else.”

Katherine broke into a little cry of somewhat painful amusement.

“You are very absurd!” she said reprovingly. “What do you know about it? At least as far as other people are concerned? You, of course, have led what may be called an uneventful life, but then you are still very young.”

“Not as young as you were, mamma,” rejoined

Sylvia plaintively. "Just think of all the things you had seen and known, long before you were my age; all those amusing years in Paris with grandmother and Aunt Ruth, and the clever, exciting people you met—and then, papa," she concluded in a lower voice.

"Yes," said Katherine with a sort of wonder, "when I was no older than you I was already married to your father, and had come here to live, and was thinking of you," looking down at her little daughter with sudden tenderness.

Sylvia caught her mother's hand, which was hanging straight beside her, and pressed it against her cheek. They both sat silent a few minutes, Mrs. Lawrence gazing musingly in front of her, Sylvia watching her more and more wistfully.

"Mamma, dear," she began again abruptly, "what is it about your eyes sometimes that makes me want to cry? Are you sad?"

"My eyes always looked sad, even when I was a child," said Katherine, recalled from her own thoughts, and smiling a little dimly. "It is something in their shape and the way they are set. Yours, on the contrary, always laugh."

"I don't want them to laugh," cried Sylvia. "It will make everybody think I can never be unhappy."

"Poor baby," said her mother, not very seriously, "are you unhappy, now?"

Sylvia nodded.

"And why?"

"I want something," she whispered with a restless sigh. "I don't know exactly what, but I think

it is sorrow. Don't say you hope I shan't have any. That is what people always do when they have had a great deal themselves. And yet you wouldn't have wished yours away, would you?"

"No," said Katherine, and caught her breath as if she would have recalled the word as soon as she had spoken it. Then she went on more seriously, though still smiling a little into Sylvia's upturned face.

"I shan't wish yours away from you, Sylvia; it will come some day, in its own time; but you know one of the things about sorrow is that it always comes from the direction you would rather not."

"The thing one would rather not," said Sylvia meditatively. "Well, I don't care!" Her mind went roving, with a kind of daring, among various possibilities. "If only you don't die, dear mamma," she concluded suddenly. "Please, don't!" She buried her face in her mother's lap.

"You little goose," said Katherine, laughing, and laying her hand lightly on her daughter's hair. "I think it must be time for you to go to bed."

"I am glad you belong to me! I am glad you are all mine!" cried Sylvia, springing to her feet and pressing her cheek against her mother's, with something of the gesture of an affectionate kitten, as she said good-night.

All hers? So she believed, and Katherine did not contradict her, though the smile which followed her as she ran upstairs grew fainter through the pang of the half-untruth. For what was there of Sylvia's in that little heap of letters, such a tiny heap indeed that

they could be entirely covered by a man's two hands, as they lay before Wilfred Cochran on his study table, though their dates reached back for many years, all the years while Sylvia was growing up and turning from a child to a woman? Nothing there which belonged to her, nothing that was not all his, all that was left him now of a much greater treasure.

He took one letter from among the last of the little heap before him, drew it from its envelope and read again the familiar words, little, cold words, formed smoothly and gracefully, in her pretty, legible handwriting. "Thank you for the book. I found it when I came home this afternoon. I was especially glad, because it told me you were back again. I missed you."

He opened another and felt a pang as he remembered his happiness when he saw for the first time the words, "Dear Wilfred." Then came one, "Wilfred, dear, you are very good never to reproach me for being cold to you. Is it because you know when I say nothing, and you say so much, that I am not silent from coldness? I think I am shy, dear. I have thoughts in my heart for you, thoughts you would like to hear, but when I try to say them, something keeps them back. Even now, when I am alone and you are far away, I feel my heart beat and my breath grow short while I am only writing 'Wilfred, dear, I love you.'"

The paper dropped from his hands, and for a few moments he sat immovable, staring widely in front of him. This was what he had got, the slow consent, after years of patient and devoted wooing; the difficult

surrender of a shy, proud nature, to whom expression came as a sort of anguish. And how had he rewarded it?

In the height of his confidence, without warning, almost without a struggle, his hidden enemy had seized him by the throat and overcome him. In the first madness of defeat nothing had seemed left to him but instant flight, escape, concealment; and then, he hardly knew how, by the dim influence of half-effaced association, he had been led to a little place where long ago, when he was a cadet at West Point, he had gone in a moment of like extremity, in the indulgence of the weakness which had ruined his career, which had stripped him of his first-class honors, and left him at last to begin the world over again, with damaged fortunes. There had been a woman there then, a girl his own age, who had been kind to him. She was there still.

When he came to his senses he found her beside him, bound to him. He took up the last of the little pile of letters.

"Dear Wilfred," it ran, "I understand and I forgive you. Please be good."

"Forgive me! Oh, forgive me!" he said, with the bit of stained and rumpled paper close against his lips, "for there is no good in me any more."



## VII

**K**ATHERINE was very busy in the Dean's garden, setting out a box of plants which had just come from the nurseries, when Stephen Dullas opened the gate.

"May I come in?" he asked with decent hesitation.

She smiled at him kindly from under her shady garden hat. "If you don't mind my going on with what I am doing. They ought to have been put in this morning, and they will be spoiled if they wait any longer."

He closed the gate behind him at once and came to stand beside her as she worked, following her from place to place, ministering to her wants with mechanical officiousness when she made demands upon him for watering-pot or garden tools. She was always surprisingly patient with him, no matter how often he came or how much of her time he wasted. She was at ease with him, sure of his affection, and touched, perhaps, more than she knew, by the sweetness of his vicarious love-making, for he came to her with all the more serious part of his sentiment for Sylvia, a perfected Sylvia, gentler, more human, less elusive, to whom he could pour out his mind with no danger of being laughed at.



But just now she was too absorbed in her own occupation to give him more than a perfunctory attention. She had on a rough pair of gauntleted gloves, and with her trowel she was digging deep holes in the earth, which she filled with water from a great green can, till they looked like a mud pie. Then she took a plant from her basket, turned it upside down with a skilful tap of her trowel against the sides of its pot, and out it dropped into the hand ready for it, a little compact bunch of earth enveloped in white roots. These roots Katherine pulled apart and shook out, and then plunged the whole plant into the place prepared for it, pressing down the oozy earth with her fingers, and, after a new baptism of water, covering it with a large flower-pot and turning to the next.

"They won't even know they have been moved," she said, as she caught Stephen's gaze fixed upon her handicraft with some interest. "There, that is the last! Will you help me up, please?"

She held out a hand which looked very white and clean when she pulled off its rough sheath. "Now, come and sit in the shade on the bench a moment and I can really attend to what you are saying."

He responded instantly. "It is that darned condition. They won't let me off without a special examination, and I don't know how I am going to get it up, just now at this season of the year. They seem to think I have nothing else to do with my time, hang them!"

Serious feeling of any kind had an unfortunate effect on Stephen. It was never enlarging, and often had the contrary result of making him insignificant or

even ridiculous. When his brown eyes ceased to laugh they often lost all expression. His voice, when he was depressed or aggrieved, assumed a monotonous, droning tone, which deadened interest. His manner, when it lost its lightness and gayety, betrayed an almost fatuous commonplace of nature.

"If they had been going to come down on me this way, why didn't they do it sooner, when it wouldn't have made so much difference," he wailed, "instead of waiting till I was practically sure of my degree; and dad coming up to make the Chancellor's address, and mother and Sylvia. Think what a fool I'll look if I fail. It is all Merritt's fault, I know. He never could bear me. It is just like him to get me stuck on purpose."

"No one can stick you, if you work hard enough beforehand," said Mrs. Lawrence anxiously; but Stephen knew better.

"Can't they, though? but all I can say is it will be dirty mean of them if they do."

He sat staring straight in front of him with blank, glassy eyes, pulling his little, rough mustache, as was a habit of his when deeply disturbed; and Katherine watched him gravely, for she was too familiar with the petty struggle that was going on over his head to be quite untouched by his mood of anxious foreboding.

"You must work very hard," she said at last gently.

He looked up. "But, confound it, I don't want to work hard! I can't work hard! I can think of nothing but Sylvia."

Katherine made no answer beyond a little reserved smile, but she looked at him very kindly as he sat with his elbows on his knees, his head clasped in his hands.

"When I think that in a month, only a month," he went on, his voice rising into a little squeal of despair, "what shall I do when I have to go away and can't see her every day. But you will give me a chance to speak to her before I go. You won't go back on me?"

She shook her head.

"I am awfully in love with her," concluded the young fellow earnestly. "I never imagined I was capable of such a feeling, such a real, deep, serious feeling for any one. I shall never care for any one as I do for Sylvia."

"But you know you have thought that same thing before about other women, Stephen," said Katherine a little cruelly. "How can you be so sure that it is the real thing this time?"

He clutched his hair and hung down his head in exaggerated self-abasement. "Don't rub it in," he pleaded, "it is mean, for you would never have known about most of them if I had not told you myself. Besides, none of them compared to Sylvia, anyhow."

She laughed. "You are very young, Stephen, to think of marrying."

"Oh, father wants me to marry early," said Stephen blithely; "he thinks nothing steadies a man more and gives him such a sense of responsibility as marrying the right sort of girl."

"Very true, but Sylvia may not be the right kind

of girl for you," answered Katherine, with a fine little smile.

He replied hotly, as at a charge of blame against the child he loved. "I don't know what you mean! I'd like to know who could be better?"

Katherine was silent, and the fine irony of her smile was entirely lost upon him.

"Of course she is pretty young," he began again, "but not as young as you were yourself when you were married."

"No," assented Katherine, her eyes fixed musingly on a distant clump of flame-colored iris, as if there could be nothing in the world more beautiful for them to rest on.

"I suppose you are thinking that I am not so much of a man as Lieutenant Lawrence was," burst out Stephen jealously. "Well, I don't suppose I am, but all the same——"

But Katherine interrupted almost sharply. "It is Sylvia herself I am thinking of. It is impossible to compare her with me, Stephen; she is very unlike me. She will demand more from life than I ever did. She is more critical, more intolerant; she would not be very merciful to any one who disappointed her."

"But I shouldn't disappoint her," said Stephen confidently. "She should have everything she wanted."

"You really know very little about Sylvia." Mrs. Lawrence looked at him suddenly, with a little teasing smile.

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed in great indignation, "when I've been doing nothing but think of her

for nearly two years! Two years! How's that for constancy? We like the same things. We want the same kind of a good time. She doesn't care for any one else, does she?" He looked at Katherine anxiously, though he knew there was no one. "And once we were married she should have anything in the world she wanted. I should give her everything she asked for."

"Yes, but suppose she asked you for things you couldn't give her?"

"What things?" asked Stephen vaguely.

Katherine shook her head. She saw that he could not understand her.

"I don't believe you want me for a son-in-law," he burst out, half-caressing, half-threatening. "You don't think I could make her happy."

Mrs. Lawrence smiled back at him without replying. She had the gift of silence, so gentle, yet so impervious, that an unobserving person often took it for conversation and approval. Besides, Stephen had not taken his own accusation very seriously.

"I know her so well," he continued, "that I know just what will please her. She is such a baby, dear little thing! You'll see what a good time she has this evening. Of course she can dance up and down on me—but the other fellows! I shall arrange that her card is filled by the best men in the fraternity. There is nothing much left since my class graduated, but some of them can dance well. She shall have all the flowers she wants. By the way, have those roses come from Statesburg? I gave special orders. Marechal Niels—she said those were what she wanted."



"Yes, they came this morning. Sylvia will thank you herself. She was very much excited at getting such a formal offering in a florist's box."

"Dear little thing!" muttered Stephen, rising at last reluctantly to go away. "You are sure you don't want a carriage for this evening? You know we have arranged for one to fetch all the chaperons. Well—" as she shook her head, "it is only a step, and a beautiful night. I don't wonder you prefer walking to going in one of Hazard's smelly old hacks. I'll be along about nine to walk over with you. By the way—" he stopped, reminded of a lesser grievance he had almost forgotten in his discussion of the more serious annoyances come to threaten his peace of mind. "I have often told you before, but you can just see now how impossible it is to do anything really decent in this college. You know how I have been working to make this ball a success for the fraternity—our first formal entertainment in the new house. You know how I have been trying to keep the fellows from asking all the old frumps they knew to receive with you. And now, at the last moment, we have Mrs. Cochran on our hands."

Katherine's eyes had gone to rest on the flame-colored iris again, but she brought them back to Stephen with a sudden start, and widening of the lids, which showed the pain of an unpleasant surprise.

"Mrs. Cochran?" she echoed rather faintly.

"Yes," said Stephen crossly. "Of course we had to ask her, if only out of civility to Cocky—the Professor, I mean. He sent us a thumping check for expenses without waiting to be asked, and he is always



awfully good to the fraternity. We put her name among the other patronesses in the invitations, but we never dreamed she would come. You know she never goes anywhere. I suppose she will look an awful frump."

"Oh, I hope not," answered Katherine gently. "In any case, you must see that the other men are very nice to her."

She drew her breath softly through her lips in a long, slow sigh, but Stephen only saw her smile "Good-by."

"Good-by. At nine o'clock this evening. Don't forget!" he shouted back at her as he shut the gate.

## VIII

STEPHEN was prompt to the moment of the hour that he had appointed for himself; so prompt, in fact, that he found no one ready for him but Mrs. Lawrence, who was standing alone in the flower-filled drawing-room buttoning her long gloves.

"Where is Sylvia?" he asked, looking round anxiously.

"Gone to get her flowers from the ice-box, where Molly put them to keep fresh."

Even as she replied, she appeared in the parlor door, a radiant vision, her garments still fluttering from her rapid flight. She did not take the slightest notice of Stephen, but extended toward her mother a heavy bunch of yellow roses, which she held at arm's length.

"They smell of fish!" she exclaimed tragically.

It was too true. Even Katherine, when called upon for an opinion, could not deny that very slightly, but very distinctly, they did smell of fish.

"I'll have that fellow's life!" cried Stephen.

"No, no! It was Molly! I found them in the ice-box, lying close beside the codfish for to-morrow."

There was a silence, during which Sylvia continued to survey and smell her flowers with increasing disfavor.

"I shan't carry them at all," she said at last. Stephen tried in vain to conceal his disappointment.

"Sylvia," said Katherine in a very low voice. She was answered by a swift, sidelong glance of mischievous deprecation.

"Am I behaving very badly?"

Her mother answered gravely, "Very badly."

"I am sorry," she replied, not too seriously. "Stephen, thank you for these beautiful roses. It was very kind of you to think of me, and they were just what I wanted. At least, they aren't quite," she concluded with a sudden change of tone. "I thought they were going to be pink."

Stephen burst into a great roar of good-natured laughter. "Did you think Marechal Niels were pink?"

But Katherine did not even smile, and Sylvia, mistrusting her silence, turned to her coaxingly.

"Don't be cross with me, mamma dear, now that I have repented and Stephen has forgiven me. Please don't, for I can't begin to have a nice time as long as you look severe, and it is my first party, and quite necessary that I should enjoy myself."

Her spirits flew up like champagne as soon as she saw her mother betrayed into laughter, and she had no thought but delight when she found herself walking about the little ballroom on Stephen's arm, childishly pleased that he was so tall and good-looking, exhilarated by his shouts of laughter at her smallest sallies. They had been among the first to come, but the room filled up almost immediately. The semi-

circle of arm-chairs prepared for the patronesses was surrounded by an ever-changing group of new arrivals.

Mrs. Loomis, blandly middle-aged, in an ample black silk; Mrs. Chandler, whose thin, aquiline face and spare figure still showed the remnants of former beauty, and Mrs. Lawrence. These three, at least, were capable of satisfying Stephen's standard of requirement for the outer appearance of the ladies whom the Adelphics might wish to receive their guests for them that evening. And the other chair of state had been prepared in vain.

At last the orchestra ceased to tune its fiddles and began to play a march. All the couples instantly fell into line for the ceremony with which the college dances were usually initiated. Round and round the room went the small procession, through various simple evolutions, Sylvia and Stephen leading the way. She had never before felt so gracious toward him, so appreciative of his importance in the enjoyment of an honor for which he alone was responsible, and she was half-intoxicated with the aroma of festival, that small but important adjunct which rises like an effervescence out of the most commonplace things and people, when they are assembled together with the idea of enjoying themselves.

Too soon the grand march came to an end, and the programmes were distributed, and then Sylvia found herself standing in a group of black-coated youths, some of whom she knew, some whom Stephen had just presented, who were all asking to write their

names on her card. She watched its progress among them with dancing eyes.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, as a tall, slender Senior inscribed his initials in the last two places and returned it with a bow.

Marjorie Chandler was standing near her, looking very pretty, though somewhat preoccupied by the way her sash ends hung behind.

"Sylvia," she whispered, quite scandalized, "don't say 'Thank you,' that way. It sounds too grateful."

"But I was grateful," returned Sylvia with her gay smile. "I was so afraid he would find those dances taken on his card. Now, see, there isn't a space left."

Franklin Field, coming up at this moment, was received with triumphant assurance, "Not one left." She could not feign a regret she did not feel. Just now she was riding on the crest of the wave, a pleasant place if one wishes only to enjoy oneself, and tonight Sylvia had forgotten that she had ever felt the slightest curiosity about any other sensation. Nothing ever happens on the tops of the waves. One has to go down beneath to learn the strength of the currents, and there Sylvia never sank, not once through the whole evening, though even Marjorie peeped and found things underneath once or twice; girls who had difficulty in getting partners, some of the young hosts themselves, who looked fagged and anxious under the responsibilities of their position.

Professor Chandler, looking as exquisitely pink and white as a silk powder-puff, his short, curling, gray hair and whiskers perfectly arranged around his bland-

ly smiling countenance, came and stood by Mrs. Lawrence, and took a whimsical pleasure in pointing out the places where the recent struggle of preparation for the festival showed loose ends of imperfect completion.

“So pretty!” He pronounced the word as it was spelled—with an “e.” “So graceful, yet everything left unfinished. See!” he made her peep in an out of the way corner, hidden out of sight, where a great mass of fading flowers, broken branches of lilacs, pink honeysuckle, and the white fringe tree, lay thrown together and left among other rubbish to die. “The poor, pretty flowers!” he exclaimed pityingly, for many of them came out of his own garden. “And yet, I suppose, it was necessary. The young are always spendthrifts.”

“Poor boys!” said Mrs. Lawrence, with a more personal interest in the matter, as she thought of Tom, “they have worked so hard, and some of them look so tired.”

“Yes, they have wasted more than their lilacs. Well, they can afford it. It is only old age that needs to husband its resources.”

“Dear Albion, how silly you are!” said his wife, drawing near, and speaking to him with her usual affectionate depreciation, which he, on his part, never seemed to resent.—“Kitty, look here a moment! Do you see who is just coming in?”

Katherine started nervously, looked, and was silent.

There was Miss Mix, her ignoble, good-natured



countenance beaming with friendliness for all the world; Mrs. Brauer, decorously attired in a high, gray mohair dress, and a yellow lace fichu disposed around her meagre throat, and Mrs. Cochran.

All the faces about her were either almost silly with youthfulness or else emptied of all significance by the hypnotizing effect of the whirling crowd of dancers passing and repassing in endless succession. Only that one face started out in strange, almost shocking contrast to the others in its brooding intensity of expression, its watchful self-consciousness, ominous suspicion. It was difficult to guess exactly what rank and circumstance had produced, only some tragedy could finally have set such a woman down in such surroundings. She still showed the wreck of a certain kind of beauty—rolling, dark-brown eyes, whose suffused surface seemed to show the flesh they were made of; coarse, curling black hair, purple cheeks, a redundant breast, over which the ill-fitting black silk dress she wore was strained almost to bursting. Yet there was a kind of carelessness and stupidity in her adornment which seemed to show the virtuous woman, and her manner, in its brooding defiance and self-restraint, was not without a certain rough dignity.

The little group stood hesitating a moment, unattended, unnoticed by their young hosts, all too busy in their own amusement to spare time for ceremonious civility.

“Why does she stay over there by the door, do you suppose?” Mrs. Chandler continued with a little nervous giggle. “She looks quite imposing. Oh! are

you really going over to speak to her? Well, I'll come too."

But it was Miss Mix who sustained the burden of conversation in the courtesies that followed.

"No, I don't think we had better go across and sit with you all; I am afraid of the draught from the window for Mrs. Cochran. I had the greatest work to persuade her to come, and I should never forgive myself if she caught cold. No, we'll just stay here, thank you. We can see nicely, and it is not so near the music. We are only going to stop for supper; the professor is coming over then to take her home."

At this mention of her husband Mrs. Cochran, for the first time, raised her face and fairly met Katherine's rather shrinking glance with a look which seemed to unveil something in the depths of her stupid, savage soul; something resentful, suspicious, and yet not without a certain flaunting triumph.

"Could anybody be colder than you, Kitty, when you don't like a person?" said Mrs. Chandler in friendly amusement, as they retraced their steps across the room.

The other answered rather languidly: "I did not mean to be cold; I am afraid I have an unfortunate manner."

"Oh, no, not at all! You were magnificent! Nothing could have been more admirable than your serene civility. I confess I was terrified; I felt my knees become as water under me. You never can tell what will happen next with such a woman, and really she was very rude to us, Kitty."

"Perhaps she did not mean to be rude," said Katherine after a moment's pause. "It is quite possible she resented our manner to her as much as we did hers to us."

She turned with evident relief to answer Tom, who had been looking for her, and now welcomed her re-appearance with unconcealed satisfaction.

"Mother, may I speak to you? Will you come with me for a moment?"

He looked worn and distracted, and his face was deeply shadowed with that ineffable youthful weariness, purifying, transparent, infinitely touching, which has so little kinship with the withering, disfiguring exhaustion of maturer years. He led her out beyond the circle of lights and dancing to the back veranda, where Bob Merton, his fellow-committeeman, came to join them. Both lads were distressed to the limits of their youthful self-control. Merton's blue eyes were full of tears under their fierce eyebrows, nor was the faint, dark shadow of Tom's budding mustache able to conceal the trembling of his lips. Another freshman, Jimmy Snell, was there too, lurking somewhat shamefacedly behind the open door of the pantry. But the others quite ignored him; and, indeed, his turned-up nose and broad, smiling mouth seemed quite out of place in the presence of their tragic intensity.

"O mother!" Tom began at once, his voice breaking a little in his hurry and agitation, "Bob and I are in such a scrape. Perhaps you can advise us."

"A scrape, dear Tom!" cried Katherine anxiously, "do tell me about it. What can it be?"

"We forgot the sugar for the coffee," he answered, with a gasp which in a girl would have been a sob.

Katherine drew a breath of relief so sharp that it was almost painful. Life is sometimes so hard, so entangled; its demands are often so intricate, so cruelly impossible. To be confronted by a problem still so simple that it can be solved by the offer of a few herbs and apples, given with an unstinting hand, is such an exquisite surprise that it touches one's self-control more than a blow.

"It is my fault!" said Tom desperately.

"No more yours than mine!" cried Merton in loyal parenthesis.

"I don't know how it happened." He put his hand across his eyes and held it there a moment with an inherited gesture, as he went on speaking. "I could have sworn I gave the order, but it hasn't come."

"All the upper classmen will laugh at us when they find it out," said Bob in an agony, but Tom muttered under his breath:

"It is the disgrace to the fraternity that I mind."

"Can't you advise us, Mrs. Lawrence?" said Jimmy Snell, encouraged by her presence to venture out from behind his barricade, his face drawn into the very absurdity of seriousness.

"Yes, indeed," she hurried to assure them. "Why didn't you come to me before? Dear Tom, you can get all the sugar you want if you run across by the back way to the kitchen, and if Molly and Lizzie have gone to bed, you know where it is kept. I gave an

order to have the canister filled only yesterday, so I am sure there is plenty."

Tom turned and rushed off at once into the darkness, leaving Bob to take his mother back to the ball-room. It was only a little way across a narrow strip of campus, past the office building to the Dean's garden gate, and then by the back way into the kitchen. There, unhindered by the curtainless darkness, not waiting to light the lamp on the table, he found and loaded himself with his treasure and departed, leaving every closet door open. A moment after he was running back again up the glimmering white path leading to the fraternity house. The goal of his rapid flight stood very near, pouring light from every one of its lower windows, as transparent as a bubble in its illumination from inside, when he nearly ran over some one going the same way, walking very quickly, yet with a sort of rigidity of direction which did not turn out for him.

"I beg your pardon," Tom cried, crashing into the shrubbery which bordered the path in his hurry to get ahead and lose no time.

Then he saw that the tall, dark figure was Wilfred Cochran.

"Good Lord, he is drunk!" said the boy to himself, and hesitated and almost turned back in the fear that took possession of him. But then he hurried on again. Some of the other fellows must see to that.

"I can't do everything," he muttered to himself in a sort of helpless apology.

He returned to a scene of growing confusion in the



kitchen of the fraternity house. Supper was already being served in the ballroom; the place was invaded with boys demanding food for their guests. The old colored woman they had hired for this emergency was growing more and more excited by the difficulties and deficiencies of her position. Tom stayed only long enough to supply her with the belated sugar for the coffee and then hurried off to the ballroom to find Marjorie Chandler, whom he had engaged for supper. He swept her away to a cool corner by one of the windows, where Bob Merton and one of the Loomis girls were saving a seat for him beside Stephen and Sylvia. It was his reward for past exertions that Bob should go for the supper. Tom had at last come out into the light places of the earth and was preparing to enjoy himself.

He cast one satisfied glance about the gayly lighted room, that he might assure himself at last of the brilliant success of his fraternity's last social effort. Then he looked again, more anxiously, here and there, for he had suddenly become conscious of a strange, hidden agitation somewhere in the midst of the rustling, chattering throng around him. Among the merry, freshly tinted faces of the groups at supper round the room, here and there one stood out unsmiling, shadowed with a kind of expectancy, an almost strange attention and suspense, all turned in the same direction.

"O Tom," said Marjorie in his ear, "look at Professor Cochran! Isn't it shocking? Some of you ought to make him go home."

But Tom had already caught sight of that tall,



rigid figure standing against the wall, silent and motionless, staring, with eyes that saw nothing, into the blank space before him. There was a kind of emptiness near him, as if people had withdrawn themselves, perhaps in protest, perhaps from a certain alarm, for in spite of his absolute stillness there was something formidable in his expression as he stared out straight in front of him, his eyebrows sharply raised and drawn together, as if in a last desperate effort to steady his swimming senses. On his lips there was a strange, painful smile, hardly a smile indeed, rather an agonized muscular contraction, which seemed to draw his face into a mask of tragic, poignant madness. His eyes saw nothing of what they looked at, but one shrank involuntarily from the place where they rested, as if at any instant they might wake to consciousness, wild with question, or laughter, or anger, or despair. A little distance away, among her friends, Tom saw Mrs. Cochran in agitated palpitation, moving vaguely to and fro behind the two poor women who were bending over her trying to restrain her. He was conscious, too, of Mrs. Chandler, with her hand on her husband's arm, her small, dark head, with its haggard features, moving to and fro, as she gesticulated earnestly, evidently exhorting the bland little man to some action; to avert something which might become humiliating, unmanageable, scandalous; while he was evidently reassuring her, and Colonel Loomis, who had come in lately to look after his wife, stood by, also quiescent, though big and ominous with disapproval. Among the lads who saw, too, here and there one moved rest-

lessly and uncertainly. "Let him alone," whispered others, "he is not doing anything. If we try to speak to him, he may make a row."

Marjorie looked on with great, ruminating, brown eyes, rounded into shocked curiosity; but Sylvia saw nothing at all; she was busy snapping rose leaves against the backs of Stephen's hands, and did not even notice when Tom sprang to his feet and walked away across the room. He could not help it; something must be done—if by no one else, then by him—to save the fraternity dance from painful interruption, to rescue an Adelphic from open humiliation.

A quiver of expectancy went through those who were looking on, as they saw him approach the silent, stony figure against the wall. He laid his hand on its arm. Wilfred Cochran stirred slightly and bent his anguished eyes on Tom with a growing effort of attention. Then there was an almost audible sigh of relief throughout the room, for his face suddenly changed and melted; his smile ceased to be formidable, became foolish, harmless, merely drunken. He let Tom lead him away quietly out into the darkness beyond. Before any one began to notice her again, Mrs. Cochran was gone after her husband.

The whole affair had taken a very few moments. The murmur of laughter and gay movement had hardly been diminished; it now reasserted itself with a burst of almost turbulent merriment which quite drowned the undercurrent of confused whisperings, shocked criticism, and explanations; but the undercurrent persisted, running stronger and stronger among the older

people beneath the foam of youthful laughter, stealthily at first, in the memory of old resentments between the town and the college whose dignity Cochran had compromised. Even among the faculty general indignation against him had to assume a strained and cautious expression in the thought of the Dean's unwise championship, in the presence of the Dean's daughter. As long as she sat there among them in a sort of resolute, unsmiling composure, they had to keep their eager tongues in check. But she went at last, effecting her retreat with a careful watchfulness which ran no risks of invasions upon their self-restraint.

"O mamma, so soon!" cried Sylvia in dismay, as she looked up from the midst of the gay party still lingering over their ice-cream in one of the windows, and saw her mother standing beside her on Professor Chandler's arm.

Tom sprang to his feet at once, but Stephen joined Sylvia in a clamor of reproach and entreaty for just one more waltz, just once more round the room.

"Come along, Sylvia, don't be a pig!" said Tom gruffly. "Don't you see that mother is tired?"

But Sylvia still exclaimed: "O mamma, the music is just beginning again! Just one more dance!"

"No," answered Mrs. Lawrence with a sort of unyielding, expressionless gentleness, which permitted no appeal.

Tom and Stephen took them home. They let themselves in carefully, so as not to waken the sleeping household.

“Mamma,” whispered Sylvia, “may Stephen come in, too, and have some milk? He likes milk, you know, and there is a big pitcher of it in the ice-box.”

But Katherine was obdurate, and the youth submitted, with what grace he might, to be sent away at the door, lingering a few moments for some last words about a dying rose for his buttonhole.

The others entered the shuttered darkness of the house.

“It went off pretty well, on the whole. Don’t you think so, mother, considering it was the first in the new house?” asked Tom anxiously.

He could only hear her voice. “Very well, indeed, dear. I am sure it will be a great success.” But he felt her catch hold of him and lean against him, hiding her face against his shoulder.

“O Tom, my little boy! my big son!” she whispered with a long, sobbing breath.

He put both arms round her and bent over her, half-ashamed, for he thought she was laughing at him, but loyally still.

“It is all right, mother, I don’t mind; and I suppose I did make an awful ass of myself about that sugar.”

Sylvia, flying after them, having finally dismissed Stephen, found her still in his arms.

“O mamma, you love Tom best!” she cried indignantly.

Katherine disengaged herself and stood looking at them both in the half-light, surprised for the moment into a certain wan amusement at the two young creat-

ures, facing each other in such hot defiance after the shock of Sylvia's outburst of reproach.

"Are you never going to be anything but a child, Sylvia?" she said at last, with a catch in her voice that was sharper than laughter.

## IX

**F**RANKLIN FIELD, the blue-eyed tutor, sat on the window-sill in the third-story back room, which for the time he called his own, in Miss Mix's boarding-house. The outlook was not unpleasing, even though it commanded nothing more than back gardens, kitchen entrances, and dilapidated sheds, for the horse-chestnuts were in bloom to their highest tips, and the vine was everywhere freshly, beautifully green—the vine, in other lands so carefully and reverently trained and fostered, debased here into all sorts of unworthy services, as a screen for wood-piles and garbage heaps, or a rough fence marking the limits of the kitchen garden and the clothes yard. The northwest exposure gave to Franklin, sitting in the window, a wide expanse of blue, sunset sky, against which the needle-like wooden spires of the little town stood out dark brown above the clustering trees.

The room itself was large and low and dingy, tainted with the smell of long-dead tobacco smoke, which seemed to have become a part of its very walls; furnished in the double capacity of bedroom and study, but with a simplicity and meagreness that left it very empty. There was a little bookcase in one corner, where rows of college text-books were here and there enlivened by yellow-covered novels, from



which, however, Franklin's position as tutor of French and German in Littel College withdrew all compromising significance. The study table, an ugly, serviceable affair, with a bare pine top, four strong, brown legs, and a deep drawer, was loaded with papers and exercise books, the first fruits of the senior examination, which antedated the lower classes by nearly three weeks.

In the depths of a dingy, chintz-covered chair, between the window and the table, sat Professor Brownell, the head of the classical department, who was making the tutor an afternoon call, and taking his ease, as far as is possible with a man who doesn't smoke, while discussing at length the subject which had absorbed all others among the faculty since Wilfred Cochran's unfortunate appearance at the fraternity dance two days before.

"Well, he has done for himself now. Even the Dean can't support him any longer after this," said Brownell, with a sort of buoyant satisfaction in an indisputable fact, which did not necessarily mean special animosity toward the person under discussion, for he added almost immediately:

"Poor Cochran! Somehow I always liked Cochran, though there is no denying he had a darned unpleasant way of saying things when he felt like it. One had always to remind oneself that he was nobody's enemy as much as his own. I hear he has gone off again—not shown up since Friday night."

Franklin sat listlessly leaning against the window frame, his head bent forward, a little on one side, his

eyes, which were singularly blue and clear, fixed on the tops of the fruit trees in the next garden. He was bored, melancholy, indifferent, for he never forgot to consider himself an alien amid circumstances and actors from which he would fain hold himself aloof. So he answered the inquiry with a kind of plaintive patience, since he could hardly deny some knowledge on a subject of which Miss Mix was high priestess, and her dining-room a centre of information. Cochran had indeed disappeared, and no one, not even his wife, had the least idea of his whereabouts.

"It is about the worst thing that could have happened for the Dean," said Brownell meditatively.

"Why the Dean?" asked Franklin, betrayed into some surprise.

"Well, you see, if he were anywhere he could be got at, some of the Dean's friends might be able to use their influence with him to make him send in his resignation, in which case the trustees need do nothing but accept it. But now that he has gone off this way and left everything at loose ends, the whole matter must come up for action at the next meeting, and the old Dean may have to hear things said he will find hard to swallow. You know how near he sailed to the wind already, when he insisted on retaining Cochran against the sense of the whole board last June. All this gives a mighty good handle to the other side." Brownell flung his head back against his chair and began to beat a tattoo upon the arms with his restless fingers.

"What other side?" murmured Franklin, conscious of a faint anxiety, for he could not help remem-

bering that his tutorship, despised indeed, but necessary for his daily bread, had come to him by one of those irregular, high-handed appointments by which the Dean was always overriding the rights of the trustees and the wishes of the faculty, and might be very much endangered by the existence of another side, if it should happen to be unfriendly to him. He looked up and caught Brownell's eyes fixed on him with a sort of careful scrutiny.

"Of course, you wouldn't be likely to know much about it," said the other man with deliberation. "The Dean has kept you very closely in his own interest. We haven't cared to say anything before you that we were not ready to have go back to him."

Franklin reddened a little, for he thought that the other might be wishing to insult him, but Brownell's manner showed nothing but friendliness as he continued.

"Still, I think it is just as well for you to know that the Dean is not nearly as strong a man in the college as he used to be. There are plenty of men on the faculty, in the alumni, and higher yet, too, who are beginning to think that he has lost his grip, and needs to be watched; needs a coadjutor, in fact; a man who could gradually assume all the practical running of the college, even if the old fellow were retained in a kind of nominal supremacy; even if he were let to think he was still doing it all."

"Wouldn't that be rather difficult?" asked Franklin cautiously. "The Dean is a very old man; I have no doubt he has lost a good deal of his original force

of mind, still, even now, he seems to me very far—" he faltered and hesitated with his soft, deprecating manner, surprised, and really offended at what seemed to him a sort of indignity to his mother's kind old friend, yet afraid to commit himself too soon against what might be the winning side if it came to a final struggle between the Dean and his faculty.

"Well, that depends," said Brownell, kicking his legs about. "He may find there is nothing left for him to do but to grin and bear it. I have reason to know that there are plans on foot—of course it is being kept very quiet."

"Then why are you telling me?" said Franklin in his heart, but he kept the words from his lips, for he felt that it might be to his interest to know what was being kept very quiet, if for any reason Brownell should happen to tell him.

"The trustees are becoming convinced that the college needs heroic measures to put it on its feet again," that gentleman went on, relapsing into cautious generalities.

"The Dean himself is a trustee," murmured Franklin, his eyes still fixed on the blue, sunset sky.

"Of course! of course! and he has strong friends on the board," answered Brownell impatiently. "A lot of hide-bound old fossils who take all he tells them for gospel truth. But there are some new men who will listen to reason, if they ever hear it; some of the later appointments. We have canvassed them rather carefully. Of course Porter is all on the Dean's side. He took the place of his father, old Judge Porter, who

thought he owned the whole college, except what belonged to the Lawrences, uncle and nephew. The Porters were great people about here in the past, I am told, but the college was cheated out of the legacy the old man left it, for the estate turned out worth just nothing at all, frittered away by bad investments; the son was in my class, lives in New York, and is a rich man now, but I am willing to bet we will never see any of his money. He was put on the board ten years ago by the Dean's influence, but he never comes to the meetings or takes any interest. As for the other men, except Dullas—you know how keen the Dean is to keep Dullas in a good humor—they seem a pretty decent set, quite ready to see reason if they only get a chance."

Brownell broke off suddenly and cast a scrutinizing glance at the youthful figure, with its fair, bent head and listless attitude, outlined against the sky. Then he began again on a new line.

"Of course you came here bound hand and foot to the Dean's interests; you owed him your appointment. Well, I guess he has made you pay for it," and the professor laughed rather rudely.

Franklin winced. There were a number of men in the college who went about the Dean's business, furnishing their quota of unspecified service in return for past benefits and obligations—the Dean's henchmen they were called, even by the Dean's friends, this especial weakness of the eager, unscrupulous old autocrat being well known to all the little world he lived among.

One of the Dean's henchmen! There could be no



other meaning to the professor's burst of contemptuous laughter.

"I wish you knew Merritt better," Brownell concluded, relapsing into gravity again. "I am afraid you are rather prejudiced against him now, but I tell you the more you see him the more satisfied you will be that he is the man to pull this college out of the hole it is sunk in. He may not cut any ice with the swells who turn up their noses at their old classmates, and have grown too fine to send their sons to their own alma mater, but he holds the younger alumni in the hollow of his hand. It is the new blood of the college that sooner or later is going to make itself felt. The trustees are beginning to understand already; they will understand better when they see the faculty arrayed as a unit in their demands."

"Are they arrayed as a unit?" asked Franklin, wondering a little where he himself stood in the alignment.

"Practically they are," replied the other with confidence. "Of course there is some dead wood on the other side; the Dean's old friends; that old fool, Chandler, for instance; but the workers—the men with futures before them! That is the reason I am talking to you this afternoon. It is Merritt who proposed it. 'He is too good a fellow to be left out. We want him too,' he said to me, 'and I propose to give him a chance.'"

"It is very kind of him," said Franklin politely. "How does he propose to give me a chance?"

He was amused and surprised to find how flattered



he felt that Merritt, the blatant, the insolent, Merritt, who had insulted him on every possible occasion of their past intercourse, laughing at him, making his work with his students ten times more difficult by his open derision, should accord him now these belated expressions of regard. Yet he listened intently as Brownell went on talking, for he had begun sometimes to feel a dreary disgust for the creed he had learned from his mother, so full of impossible virtues and unsuspected meannesses, where reverence and gratitude went hand in hand with loss of self-respect and a state of servile dependence. The other side, little as he admired them, small as was the sympathy which could exist between him and their methods of action and expression, might nevertheless be able to offer him opportunities for self-advancement more satisfying to a man's pride than any he had ever gained from the Dean.

The other side was evidently not lacking in virility and audacity of conception. Brownell spoke of a letter which Merritt had been preparing—a sort of protest from the faculty directly to the trustees.

“How else can they know how affairs are being run here?” he asked with some justice.

It was to be sent, signed, to every one of the trustees individually, with the request that he should consider its contents before the June meeting.

“Of course the more names we have, the better,” said Brownell frankly. “Not that we care a snap for old Chandler's, or little Billy Pepper's. In fact, those we would rather leave off than on. But yours is a dif-

ferent matter ; there is always work for a man like you on this college faculty, and we would like to keep you. There is to be a meeting at my house this evening of the protestants—that is what we call ourselves. If you come it won't commit you to anything, but you will see exactly what our demands are."

Franklin hesitated. "What time?" he asked at last, faintly.

He had never felt the necessity of taking any but a passive part in the endless bickerings of the faculty with their president, and when he suddenly found himself personally involved, his position in Littel College jeopardized or assured by the side he took, he felt himself shaken by the inevitable attraction that all weak natures feel to an irrevocable decision, not realizing that to a weak nature no decision is ever irrevocable, but must be made and remade with endless anguish until fate itself steps in and decides by removing all alternatives.

The sound of the tea bell broke gratefully upon their conversation.

"Won't you stay to supper?" said the young tutor in his soft, plaintive voice.

But Brownell declared that he must go, that he was expected at home. He went clattering downstairs in great haste, on his way to his wife and imprudently large family, stopping at the door a moment to call back:

"Eight o'clock sharp, remember! We shall expect you!"

## X

MISS MIX sat at the head of her own table behind the silver tea kettle and the piles of old blue cups which had been her mother's. She had lived all her life in this comfortable, roomy old house, with its Greek portico and fluted wooden pillars, and had sat in the same place at every meal since her mother died and left her, a girl of fifteen, to take care of her father—Littelton's family doctor.

For thirty years she had poured out cups of fragrant tea from the same Chinese teapot. In the old days it was her father and brothers who had drank, and sent back for more; but as time went on their places had been filled by a heterogeneous assemblage of old friends or the friends of old friends. A word from the Dean, for his mother's sake, had given Franklin the entrance into this selected society, which only strangers to its evolution ever called a boarding-house. But once received, he had become one of Miss Mix's prime favorites, and sat on her left, in the very shadow of the tea-tray, where she asked after his health with motherly interest at every meal, and confided in him so much information concerning her own affairs and those of other people that he was proportionately surprised, when he took his place at the tea-table somewhat later than usual, to find a lady of whose advent he had not been forewarned—a lady not young, but

still very young looking, and especially interesting to Franklin because bearing many of the signs and hall-marks of the wider world from which he felt himself an exile.

He stood with his hand on the back of his chair, hesitating before he took his seat, till Miss Mix turned round and saw him.

“Oh, here is Mr. Field at last!” she cried. “You are late, Mr. Field. I was beginning to think you had deserted us. Well, it would have been your own loss, for here is my old friend Miss Ethel Porter, dropped down upon us unexpectedly, who says she knows your mother and has a message for you from her.”

The new-comer smiled upon him cordially.

“Yes, I saw your mother only the other day, and she told me I should find you here, but I think I should have recognized you anywhere as Emily Franklin’s son. You are the image of her; besides, I remember seeing you once, I won’t say how many years ago. You were still a very little boy, just promoted to knickerbockers, so I shall forgive you if you confess to having forgotten me.”

“I still wear knickerbockers,” said Franklin, in his soft, somewhat plaintive voice, “as I can show you if you ever do me the honor to play tennis with me; and I am afraid I shall never be anything but a very little boy,” he concluded, in deprecating acknowledgment of his small stature.

Miss Porter looked at him a moment intently with her bright brown eyes. She had a spirited head, which she held with graceful erectness, an almost girlish

figure, and a fresh young voice. Only her gray hair betrayed her as having entered upon that tableland of preserved youth, formerly known as middle age, where American women know so well how to retain themselves that they descend from it into the grave more easily than into obvious decrepitude.

"I can see at a glance that you don't belong here," she said to him, laughing. "And I am not so sure I like to find you here. 'I don't say you may not be an improvement, but I am conservative. I can't get over the shock of seeing a person of your years on the faculty of Littel College. But tell me how you like it. Of course you know everybody—the Chandlers?"

"Yes, they have been most kind to me. I had the pleasure of dancing with Miss Marjorie at the Adelphic dance the other night."

"Marjorie Chandler grown old enough to go to dances! The last time I was here I remember spending an afternoon dressing a doll for her and the little Lawrence girl—Sylvia, of course. When did there ever fail to be a Sylvia Lawrence? How has she turned out? She ought to be very pretty if she looks at all the way her mother did when she was her age. Is Kitty as lovely as ever, Harriet?"

Miss Mix's square, twinkling face was shaded for a moment with cold reserve.

"Well, we are all grown older, I suppose," she said guardedly. "Everybody said she looked very well at the fraternity dance the other night. She was there with Sylvia, dressed like a girl! I declare it gave me quite a turn to think of poor Tom dead in his grave



and every one else dancing. He was always such a one for balls and parties. But I mistrust that there was a single other person in the room that gave him a thought. I suppose she will take Sylvia to all the parties this Commencement."

Miss Porter passed over most of this speech with a smile of mischievous appreciation of the jealousy that lay beneath.

"Sylvia, too! Going to parties! Alas! there are no little girls left anywhere. But I am quite curious to see how she has turned out. She was a bewitching little creature. I remember telling her once that she was very pretty. 'No, I am not,' she said very gravely. 'It is Marjorie every one thinks so pretty. I am only fascinating.'"

"Don't speak so loud!" said Miss Mix in a penetrating whisper. "That is Stephen Dullas three seats farther down the table. He is everlastingly at the Lawrences, and everybody says he is going there after Sylvia."

Miss Porter turned her alert brown eyes in the direction indicated.

"What a good-looking boy!" she said, gazing a moment calmly, and then turning away.

"I think I shall stroll up there after supper. Do you want to come, too, Mr. Field?"

Anything seemed better to Franklin than returning to his third story and his French exercises. He accepted with enthusiasm, and followed her docilely out of the front gate into the shady street.

"I suppose you are very comfortable here," she re-



marked, glancing back at the white, Greek portico shining among the trees. "Harriet is a good, kind soul, and a famous housekeeper. She has her weaknesses, of course, as no doubt you have discovered; rather pushing, rather intrusive," Miss Porter continued with facile indiscretion. "When we were all children together, Sylvia and Annie Lawrence and Nannie Chandler—Nannie Constable, she was then—and I, we were always running away from her, losing her in the college woods, and otherwise maltreating her. It would sometimes have been convenient if she had taken lasting offence at us, but she never did. You can imagine just what kind of little girl she was, always peeping and prying, listening round corners, and then coming up with offers to help just when we were ready to kill her for finding out our secrets. She adored me; she does still, though I treated her worse than any of the others did."

Franklin listened wonderingly. At last he broke in.

"I can't get used to the strangeness of finding a person like you here in the midst of this little place, talking about it as though you belonged to it."

"But I do belong to it," said Ethel, turning upon him with her bright, intent gaze.

"Oh, no, you don't, though it may please you to pretend you do!" he answered audaciously, careless how his metropolitan contempt pierced through and betrayed his feeling for his present surroundings. But Ethel did not laugh, half-flattered, and agree with him as he had expected. She answered instead with a degree of feeling which surprised him.

"I was born here, I was brought up here. My family belong to the very roots of the place. That old yellow house with the big garden, at the corner of State and College streets, was where we lived. My father was a trustee of the college for years and years. This is the only place in the world for which I have a sentiment. So you must not turn up your nose at it to me. I won't give you a ray of sympathy."

Franklin was profuse in his assurances of respect and admiration. He was a little anxious, too, to remove any impression she might have received of his disaffection or indifference to his surroundings, which might injure him with the old inhabitants of the town. But Ethel did not listen to his explanations.

"At least you can't deny that it is a very pretty old place," she said, as they approached the long lines of elms, the smooth, white walks, the green enclosures and gray walls of the college precincts. "Let us go the back way through the gardens, in memory of the time when it would have been unmaidenly and indecent to walk boldly past the dormitories and the crowds of students sitting on the steps. Silly fellows! I see them sitting there still, singing the same old songs with the same disregard of key. This is the way, right past the Merritts' windows. I hope they won't look out and see us. It used to be the dear old Curtises' when I was a girl."

The path led through the intricacies of back gardens which no fence separated one from another; it approached boldly close to kitchen entrances; it skirted a long, low trellis-work and a little grape-arbor.

"Do you smell it?" cried Ethel. "Isn't it enchanting? It is the grape in bloom."

They had come up close beside a big, straggling, unkempt house, set so far behind the others that it really faced on a back road. From two of its lower, open windows, faint and colorless in the still luminous twilight, came the glimmer of a student lamp casting its narrow light upon a study table covered with books and papers. A sound of men's voices, the acrid smoke of pipes drifted out and mingled with the odor of the grape in the garden.

"Hush!" whispered Franklin involuntarily. "I don't want them to look out and see me. It is a meeting of the faculty, where, perhaps, I ought to be."

Where perhaps he ought to be? As he spoke, he realized that his mind was not quite made up about his wisdom in the rejection of Brownell's invitation. He recognized Merritt's voice, strident, authoritative, dominating the others, and was stung again with the doubt whether, after all, safety, dignity, and ultimate advantage did not lie for him rather with that little group of eager men around Brownell's study table, than here where he was, wandering aimlessly in the perfumed darkness with a woman, one of his mother's friends.

But he walked on beside her, wavering and uncertain, still persisting, in spite of her frank assurances that she could do without him perfectly, and that he might much better go where his business called him, till they came out into the open space behind the Dean's garden. Then Ethel sprang forward with a sudden cry.

"Do my eyes deceive me, or isn't that Nannie Chandler herself coming out of the Dean's gate?"

She ran like a girl across the short grass.

"My dear Nannie!"

"Why, Ethel, where did you come from?"

Franklin sauntered up a moment afterward into a hubbub of pleased explanation, question and answer.

"I was just on my way to you if I didn't find Kitty first."

"She isn't there. I have just been looking for her in the garden. She may be over at my house now. She promised to come after tea to get Sylvia. I probably missed her by going the back way. You had better come back with me, and you, too, Mr. Field."

She smiled kindly upon the young man, who was still lingering beside them.

"Oh, he ought to be at a faculty meeting this very minute!" cried Ethel. "I have been feeling it on my conscience for the last half hour."

"A faculty meeting!" cried Mrs. Chandler in surprise. "Albion knows nothing about it. I left him at home reading the paper."

Here Franklin's demure voice broke in between them.

"Miss Porter misunderstood me. I didn't say a faculty meeting, but a meeting of the faculty. Mark the difference. You, Mrs. Chandler, will understand."

"Treason, I suppose," she said, shrugging her thin shoulders.

"Possibly."

"What do you mean?" cried Ethel, hot with curi-

osity. "Harriet Mix was in my room for two hours before supper, helping me to unpack, and I really thought I had arrived at bed-rock of Littelton gossip when she had finished, but I see she has left me unenlightened on many points."

"Oh, well, even she would hardly have the face to talk to you about the college while she is hand and glove with its bitterest enemies!"

"Enemies! Tell me all about it, or are we indiscreet to talk openly before this gentleman?"

She cast an impertinent glance at Franklin.

"Oh, no! He is on our side, of course," said Mrs. Chandler confidently. "It is only these new men, who took the places of my father and Dr. Curtis. You must remember most of them, Ethel. Professor Merritt is the ringleader, and don't you remember that dreadful Mrs. Brauer, with her toothpick and her impertinent questions? It is her husband, too, and some of the new instructors. They have formed a party in the faculty who seem to make it their business to insult and thwart the dear old Dean at every point. Albion says they make his blood boil by the way they often speak to him. But there is nothing to do but bear it. The Dean can't turn them out."

"Turn them out, why can't he turn them out?" cried Ethel, instantly dropping the inquisitive yet inattentive flippancy which had hitherto somewhat ruffled Franklin in her manner to himself, losing her temper, losing her distinction in all the simple prejudice and passion of partisanship.

"Grown old! too old!" he heard her cry at last,



her voice thrilling with genuine feeling. "Well, suppose he were, suppose he were so old that there was nothing left of him but his name? What then! Without his name and his uncle's, who outside this valley would have even heard of or cared about Littel College? These men—Merritt and Co.—when they try to enlarge themselves by putting him down, had better remember that his name now has greater power in the world than the name of the college itself, to say nothing of their insignificance."

Her words roused the enthusiasm he had once felt for the Dean as a great man; that facile enthusiasm, born of other people's applause, which had so soon waned in the chilling silences of Littel College. Her eagerness whipped him into line again. He lost the little ironic smile which had come to his lips at first as he heard his faculty colleagues abused, and thought how easily he might some day be classed among them. The momentary attraction he had felt toward the other side went out, never to be renewed. This was really his side—people who talked in soft voices, and used his own language, and hung upon his words with breathless attention when he found himself, almost involuntarily, divulging by veiled hints and cautious statements what was the purpose of that meeting of the faculty to which Professor Chandler had not been bidden.

"Do you mean to say they think they have a majority in the board of trustees? How about Richard, then?" said Ethel suddenly.

"Well, they rather count him out. You see he



comes so seldom to the meetings of the board that his vote is almost a negligible factor."

Ethel drew a long breath.

"He is coming this year," she said with a subtle change of tone.

"Oh, Ethel, are you sure?" said Mrs. Chandler.

"Yes, quite sure. He has some business with the college. He will be at the June meeting. I saw him only the other day. It is all arranged." She broke off rather abruptly.

They had nearly reached the end of the Promenade and had entered upon the shadow of the great, gray laboratory and school house of engineering. Beyond stretched the tall, brown palings of the botanic garden, and the Chandlers' house could be seen glimmering white and ghostly among its surrounding trees. But here they stopped, hearing heavy, swift steps behind them, as of some one running to overtake them. A tall, shambling figure loomed out of the twilight of the elms. It was young Hough, a scholarship student who was working his way through college—one of the Dean's henchmen. He came up now, breathless and apologetic.

"Mr. Field, may I speak to you a minute? The Dean wants you, sir."

"Now, at this minute?" said Franklin discontentedly. His old chains surprised him after his brief moment of imagined freedom.

"Yes, sir, as soon as you can, he said."

Franklin shrugged his shoulders.

"Some letters, I suppose, that he wants to get

off by the midnight mail. Well, there is no help for it."

He took ceremonious leave of Mrs. Chandler and Miss Porter and turned back with Hough down the long white path across the campus.

## XI

A VERY nice fellow, such good manners and exceedingly intelligent," said Mrs. Chandler, dismissing him absent-mindedly. "Don't let us go in just yet, Ethel. The children and Albion may be in the sitting-room and I want to talk to you."

"Yes, I want to ask you," said Ethel almost at the same moment.

They sat down on the broad top step, under the little Greek portico of the porch, with its two fluted wooden columns.

"Is it true that the Dean has broken so much?" asked Ethel at once, with a tremor in her voice.

Mrs. Chandler stammered a little.

"No, oh, no! not much! Not at all until about a year ago. You know this awful affair of Wilfred Cochran's had worn upon him dreadfully, and lately he has begun to show it a little."

"Well, do tell me, what is the truth about Wilfred Cochran? Harriet Mix has been narrating the most horrid tales, but I want them confirmed before I believe them. I never knew he had a wife, but now I hear he has deserted her."

"Oh, my dear, not exactly! A great deal worse for him, poor fellow! Of course it all happened since you were last here. You knew he drank?"

"No, I didn't. At least I knew of course that was why he was turned out of West Point, but I thought he'd got over it."

"Not entirely. It seems there were times in the past when the old craving came over him and he had to cut loose from everything; once or twice, even, since he was made professor here, but the dear old Dean covered it up and no one knew. But I believe it had been years and years since the last time, and there was every reason to think it would never happen again, when, without any warning, or any special reason to explain it, two years ago last Easter he disappeared in the middle of the term, no one knows where. The Dean finally got word from some wretched place near Highland Falls. He was there, ill. The dear old man went down himself to look after him. The awful thing about it this time was that there was a woman with him, taking care of him, who swore to the Dean that she was his wife. But if she was, there is no doubt she had taken advantage of his condition and made him marry her when he didn't know what he was doing. Albion thinks there may have been some connection in the past, perhaps from old West Point days, which made him drift there this time when he lost control of himself. When the Dean came, it was apparently too late to do anything to save him from the consequences."

"He ought never to have come back," said Ethel harshly.

"I suppose not," Mrs. Chandler admitted. "But after all, what was he to do? He hadn't a cent in the

world except his salary. She is a decent woman, according to her lights, I believe, and he had to support her. At any rate, the Dean helped him to come back. Most people think now that it was a great mistake, but he is such a brilliant man in his subject that the college hated to lose him, and every one was willing to give him another chance. We all called on his wife. You can imagine what sort of a woman she is, with that story behind her. It is my secret suspicion that she drinks too. At any rate she is utterly impossible, besides being fiercely jealous and suspicious of every one and everything connected with her husband before his marriage, which rather complicates one's expressions of good-will, doesn't it? Fortunately Harriet Mix and that horrid little Mrs. Brauer seem to find points of contact, so she is not entirely neglected. He pulled himself up at first, and did pretty well, but after his child died——"

"Did he have a child?"

"Oh, yes, very soon! Fortunately it died almost as soon as it was born. For a long time every one had known that he was drinking again, but after that he ceased to make any attempt to conceal it. In fact it is an open scandal in the town and has done so much harm to the Dean and the college. I am sure it is one of the most serious causes of all this trouble in the faculty. None of his old friends ever see him or have anything to do with him."

"Not very merciful of them," interpolated Miss Porter dryly.

"My dear, it is not their fault; it is himself. He

is always putting himself beyond the pale. I suppose Harriet Mix has told you about the dance the other night?"

"Yes. Hardly a pleasant incident to enliven a festivity, was it?"

"Well, exactly! What is one to do? With the best intentions in the world, what is one to do? Even the Lawrences see nothing of him. Kitty told me so herself the other night."

"I always thought he might be in love with Kitty," said Ethel musingly.

The other cried out in disapprobation.

"Oh, my dear child! Don't bring such lurid ideas into this simple little place. The thing is quite bad enough without that."

"He was perfectly devoted to her."

"Yes, and to the Dean. It is very natural when one remembers how much he owed to Tom. You know how fond Tom was of him, and Kitty is not the kind of person to forget a thing like that. I think she always felt a certain responsibility for him, in Tom's place, as it were. She was always angelically good to him, and I think she had a very good influence over him. He never talked in that exaggerated, extravagant way he had sometimes, when she was there. Such a pity! For he could be so nice and simple and agreeable when he was in the mood for it, and Kitty always brought out his best side."

"Still, I shouldn't say Kitty was exactly the kind of woman to inspire nothing more than Platonic friendship in a man like Wilfred Cochran."



Mrs. Chandler replied with some heat.

"Why not?"

But the other had taken refuge in flippancy.

"Far be it from me to blame her for something so entirely beyond her own control. It isn't her fault she is so peculiarly fitted to be somebody's wife that no man can know her very long without asking her to be his. Still the fact remains, and makes it not quite impossible that he, at least——"

Mrs. Chandler cried out in almost absurd annoyance and agitation.

"Why do you even imagine such a thing? As if it wasn't bad enough already. My dear, if what you say is true, it would be a tragedy, a tragedy!"

Her earnestness imposed her serious tone upon the other in spite of her efforts to escape it.

"I suppose it would," she agreed musingly; "but not nearly as bad as if she had cared for him."

The mere sight of Mrs. Chandler's outraged countenance made her hurry to defend herself.

"I haven't said she did. It was merely a suggestion. I really don't see why the very idea is so impossible. After all, Kitty is only human. And he—when I knew him, at least——" But Mrs. Chandler's indignation snatched the words from her mouth.

"Ethel, I don't know what you mean. I don't see how you have the heart, you who know all about it—her happiness with Tom Lawrence, their ideally perfect relations—her grief——"

"But it was such years ago," said Ethel feebly.

The other echoed the word with withering scorn.

“Years! My dear, what have years to do with it, when a person feels herself married for this world and the next, as I am sure Kitty does. You have only to see her from day to day, as I do, to know that her life is buried in the past, wrapped up in her children and the dear Dean. Really, Ethel,” Mrs. Chandler gave her little nervous laugh, “you make me positively uncomfortable by your hints and suggestions.”

“I wasn’t hinting,” said Ethel, laughing too. “I never said—even in my wildest imaginings I never thought more than that Kitty might have felt a mild sentiment for Wilfred Cochran, which would be aggrieved at the sudden appearance of an unheralded wife. Nothing more. I assure you, nothing more. I won’t go as far as you about the impossibility of her ever caring for any one again in this world, but I quite agree with you in this particular instance. I liked Wilfred, myself, the little I knew him. All the same, I must admit a sort of gifted uncertainty about the man which must have kept a woman like Kitty eternally upon her guard—to say nothing of her own little pose of fastidious remoteness from vulgar human weakness, which makes one feel it almost sacrilegious to imagine her in any extremity of emotion. After all, it is perfectly possible there was nothing but friendship even on his side. All conjecture based upon the obvious is unlikely to be correct in extraordinary instances, and then only by accident. What does she think about this trouble in the faculty?”

Mrs. Chandler made a little despairing gesture.

“What does she think of anything when she doesn’t

choose to tell you? She goes about and does her duty by being particularly civil when any one is particularly rude."

"I thought you said she was coming over this evening."

"Yes, I thought she was. Something must have kept her. Oh, here is Tom!" as a tall shape appeared suddenly out of the darkness and approached the two shrouded figures on the Chandlers' steps.

"Tom, where is your mother?" asked Mrs. Chandler.

"At home," answered the youth briefly, in his shy, base voice.

"Isn't she coming over?"

"I don't think so. She sent me to get Sylvia."

At this moment the upper half of the door behind them swung slowly open, and Professor Chandler's bland little face peeped cautiously out into the darkness.

"I thought I heard voices talking out on the porch for some time," he said with a mild satisfaction in his perspicacity, "but I thought it best to wait till I was quite sure you wished to come in before I opened the door."

"Well, we wish to come in now," said his wife with her usual affectionate disregard.

The front door led directly into a sitting-room quaintly old-fashioned and uncompromising in its barrenness of ornament, striped green and white wall paper, and heavy, horse-hair covered, mahogany furniture. Professor Chandler had been sitting in a small, modern rocking-chair, close to the circle of light, by

the centre table, half-asleep over the evening paper. From the porch on the other side of the house, out of the fragrant darkness where the vine was in bloom, came Sylvia and Marjorie, in white, with dazzled, luminous eyes, their cheeks smooth and pale with the coolness of the night.

"O you lovely creatures!" cried Miss Porter, with her usual frank indiscretion. "Do come into the light and let me see you. Nannie, is it possible that we were ever so deliciously, so extravagantly young as they? Do you remember who I am?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, her cheeks going up, and her lips curving prettily over her white teeth in her charming smile.

"No," said Sylvia. She never remembered any one. Life dropped away every day like the sheath of an opening flower; but she was all the more eager for the present, and her eyes began to dance with excited interest as she listened to Miss Porter and thought she recognized signs of the training and experience of that wider world of which she knew so little and thought so much, that desirable world which moved so swiftly that its inhabitants might escape the darkest shadows of repentance and reprisal, as those never could who lived in the little valley where she had been born.

"Tell your mother that I am going to be at Miss Mix's until after Commencement, and I hope to see her very soon," said Ethel as they parted at the Dean's corner, she having accepted Tom's shy offer to take her home; "and give my best love to your grandfather."

"Is that you, children?" said Katherine's voice

from the upper hall as the front door went open with its usual crash in Sylvia's heedless hand. "How late you are! Come in, and tell Molly to shut up the house."

"Tom is not in yet!" cried Sylvia, running up the shallow steps, clamorous with her sense of injury and curiosity. "O mamma, why didn't you come for me? I have been waiting and waiting for you over there!"

She reached the upper hall, dimly lighted by the lamp which hung below. Her mother was not there, but had gone before her, back through one of the doors which stood half-open, into unlit spaces of shadowy rooms beyond. Sylvia, as she followed, heard the scratch of a match and saw the light spring up from the newly kindled lamp, shedding its illumination on the heavy, swinging glass of the dressing-table, beginning to send back dim reflections of the spacious, gravely furnished room beyond. She saw her mother glance quickly, almost curiously into the glass as her own reflection grew clearer in the strengthening light; she saw her put up her hand to the soft, heavy knot of hair behind, as if looking for its disarrangement.

"Where have you been?" she asked again, eagerly, but did not wait for an answer. She was in too much of a hurry to retail her own piece of news.

"We all expected you, and there was some one you know who wanted to see you—Miss Ethel Porter. She is going to spend Commencement here."

"Hush, dear, not so loud!" said Katherine, shrinking a little, as one does sometimes when a human voice breaks in again upon solitary thinking. "Your



grandfather needed me, and I am afraid afterward I quite forgot about you until I heard Tom come in, and sent him over."

"How tiresome of grandfather!" said Sylvia crossly. "She wanted to see him too. Where is he?"

"A telegram came for him suddenly this evening while he was at supper, calling him to New York on business. He went off by the 8.57 train," said Katherine slowly, and then hesitated a moment in silence, as if deliberating how she should answer the amazed curiosity which confronted her. She spoke at last with a certain effort, a careful, gentle brevity, as if already discounting the greater length, the extravagant comment which was already beginning to buzz through the silent places of Littel College; which must sooner or later be retold for Sylvia, in spite of all the most careful restraint.

"Professor Cochran is dead. He was found in his room at the hotel where he was staying in New York. The proprietor, who knew of his connection with the college, sent the news to your grandfather, who thought no one else would be as able to do what might be required, so he went himself."

"O mamma, dead!" cried Sylvia, advancing farther into the room, full of surprise and shocked emotion. "O mamma!" she exclaimed again, in a tone still more acute with anxiety, as a second thought arose and struck her, "do you think it will put a stop to the Commencement ball?"



## XII

THE Dean was away from Littelton nearly four days. He wrote to his daughter-in-law several times, though for the most part brief telegraphic despatches, which told no more than the most necessary details. But on the third day after his departure she received a long letter, written in his usual leisurely, old-fashioned, epistolary style. When she found herself alone at the breakfast-table, Tom having departed for his first recitation, and Sylvia not yet come down, she perused it again more than once, re-reading the last pages, especially, with an almost painful attention. Dr. Lawrence was staying at the house of a friend of his, the rector of one of the uptown churches. He wrote:

“I am very comfortably settled. D—— is most attentive, and his wife a very agreeable, well-informed woman. They insisted on inviting several people to meet me yesterday evening, very informally. It was in no sense a dinner party, and I own I enjoyed it, though I began by feeling very little in the spirit for it. I had a good deal to say on that new bill for the taxing of college property now before the Legislature, and I could feel that I had succeeded in putting it before them in a new light. D—— took me round to the Century Club for a few minutes later in the evening. It is, of course, rather late in the season. People are

already beginning to leave town, but I saw a great many new faces, and several old ones. I was shocked to notice the change in my old friend Dr. Eustis, younger than I am by several years. He looked shrivelled and bent, and walked with difficulty, supporting himself with a heavy stick. I felt myself a lusty youngster beside him, for this life in New York is a great tax on a man's vitality. The constant noise and confusion is very fatiguing. D——'s house, of course, is in one of the quietest of the uptown streets, just out of Park Avenue, which, with its broad, sunny spaces and little flower gardens, imparts at least some small freshness to the stale city air. But I own, in spite of all the comforts with which I am surrounded, I have found great difficulty in sleeping since I have been here, great oppression of breathing, which makes me prefer to sit up reading or writing long after the late hour when we all retire; and the noise of the milk carts wakes me in the morning earlier than at home. The surcharge of material things provided for one's comfort ends by impressing me almost painfully. That luxury and refinement of living, whose only excuse is when it leaves a man freer from wasting detail, seems to be used here only to complicate and entangle one's simpler daily life, leaving less and less time for the things of the spirit. Perhaps just now I am the less in tune for it because I seem to see constantly before me that wretched upper room in that unsavory corner saloon, the rigid, silent figure covered carelessly with a sheet, the dreadful change on the familiar features—the tragedy of that shameful end to so much promise.

“The owner of the saloon—Michael Murphy, by name—has been most considerate, most obliging. No gentleman could have done more to make my sad task easier. But, indeed, every one has been most kind. The coroner turned out to be a Littel graduate—Bates, of '79—perhaps you remember him. I believe I told you that there were several suspicious circumstances when the body was first discovered, which made them suspect suicide. Nothing of the sort, it turned out from the autopsy. The dreadful discoloration of the upper part of the face was the result of purely natural causes. But Bates was as anxious as I to keep it out of the papers, and as luck would have it the reporter sent down by the *Globe* was another Littel College boy. He never graduated, I believe, but I remember him perfectly. The other men were a very gentlemanly set of fellows, so there has been only the merest mention of the affair in any of the daily papers.

“I have become quite familiar with this dreary locality, this wretched little upper room, with its outlook on one of those broad, squalid avenues beyond the elevated road. I am sitting alone now, at a bare table near the window above the saloon, while I write this letter to you. The proprietor's son, a most intelligent young fellow, has put himself entirely at my disposal. Only a public-school education, but the result is creditable to himself and his country. I was able to dictate to him a great number of my letters which I could not write myself, owing to the pain in my hands. I wrote Chandler about the details of the funeral, even before we could decide on the day, and through this

lad I have been able to arrange with the undertaker at Littelton, besides a hundred other small matters which I can't leave to Chandler, and should hate to impose on you, my dear Kitty. There is one thing, however, I should like you to see about, if you will. It concerns Mrs. Cochran. I do not feel it right to leave her in the dark about all the details of her husband's death and funeral. I have felt greatly tempted to write to her, yet I cannot help believing that all my former relations with her would make any news coming from me unnecessarily painful. Can you see her yourself, and explain to her as much as she will bear of the painful story? Assure her that everything has been done with the utmost consideration for her feelings and his dignity. And one other matter, my dear Kitty, I hope you won't think me too fanciful, but I should like something from Tom to lie on his coffin in the memory that they would have been soldiers together if fate had not broken him so soon. Will you see to that for Tom and me?"

Katherine folded up the letter and returned it to its envelope, letting it and her hands fall together in her lap. She was still there, leaning back in her chair, her head a little raised, her eyes strained with an inner look of more and more poignant sadness, when Sylvia came in with the cloud of an uncertain morning mood upon her brow. The shadow lifted, however, when she found herself met with no uncomfortable comment on her want of punctuality, and saw Molly come in unexpectedly with hot toast from the kitchen.

"Mamma, dear, I like that linen dress you have on.

It makes you look so nice and clear," she cried with affectionate admiration, as she stretched out her bowl of oatmeal for some more cream. "You always look so pretty in the morning."

Katherine gazed at her dimly a moment, as if she hardly saw her. Then she smiled, though not enough to drive away the melancholy of her eyes.

"Nevertheless, I must go and leave you," she said with a faint effort, after her usual half-ironic acceptance of her little daughter's flattery.

"Oh, don't go! don't go!" cried Sylvia, reduced to entreaties. "I hate so to eat alone! Don't go, and I will help you afterward with the flowers!"

Katherine shook her head.

"The flowers are finished, and I am in a hurry, for I have something to do before I go downtown. Would you like to drive with me, Sylvia, at nine o'clock?"

"Where?" asked Sylvia cautiously.

"First I must stop at Miss Mix's, and then leave some orders at Van Deusen's, and then I am going out on the Statesburg road to the nurseries."

"Will you promise me you won't make me get out anywhere?" asked Sylvia suspiciously.

Katherine laughed a little.

"You needn't go at all unless you wish. I can do perfectly well without you, and I shan't make any promises. But if it isn't too muddy we might drive a little farther out on the Statesburg road toward that pretty view. Should you like that?"

Sylvia nodded.



"Then run over to the stable as soon as you have finished your breakfast and tell Mike to bring round the horse at a quarter past nine. And put on a coat, for it is cold after the rain last night."

But Sylvia almost wished she had not gone, as she sat by her mother in the phaeton in front of Miss Mix's, and heard what seemed to her an interminable conversation between Katherine and that stout little lady, who had come out as soon as she saw the dark brown mare draw up and stop at her horse-block, and now stood, one pudgy hand on the dashboard, the other holding the side of the open top, as if she never meant to let go.

Yet it was in answer to some request of Katherine's that she was pouring out that flood of rather lurid details about poor Patty Cochran; her entire collapse when she first received the news of her husband's death; her shrieks; her hysterics; how Mrs. Brauer and Miss Mix herself had watched with her night and day; how this morning Harriet had already been to see her, but had found her calmer, more resigned. This and much more she said with her usual volubility, increased tenfold by the flattering attention of Katherine's grave blue eyes. Sylvia felt quite vexed with her mother for not cutting her short. But far from impatience, there was something almost like humility in Katherine's voice when she spoke at last.

"You have been very kind. We ought all to thank you for doing so much more than your share of the duty which belongs to us 'all alike.'"

"Oh, but I could never consider it a duty, Mrs.



Lawrence!" cried Miss Mix, her ignoble little face aflame with something that looked like genuine feeling. "In times like these, we can't but feel ourselves all sisters, and there is something in poor Patty's condition which would touch the heart of a stone. If you could only see her——"

But Katherine interposed somewhat hurriedly:

"I am sure you have been a great comfort to her, and it is to you, as her friend, that I come now." She hesitated, her brow sharpening a little under her infrequent frown. "I—I haven't been to see Mrs. Cochran. I didn't feel that she would wish it——"

"Oh, I am sure she would be very much pleased!" cried Miss Mix officiously. "Any little mark of respect in times like these is sure to be appreciated."

Katherine was silent a moment, then began again, softly putting aside the other's last remark.

"I think, however, if you will be so kind, I shall still ask you to go to her for me. I know how painful it must be for her that all these last arrangements should have been made without consulting her. She might easily resent being informed of them by some one almost a stranger, as I am—to her," Katherine added after an almost imperceptible pause.

"Well, I suppose, now you mention it, that might be so," said Miss Mix, a serious meaning beginning to dawn over her face and purse her lips. "After all, poor Patty is no more than human."

Katherine paused a moment to take breath and then went on in a voice which she kept perfectly steady, though before she had finished her face was more than

half-averted from the curious, peering eyes which were watching so intently to make their own interpretation of any shade of unexpected expression they found there.

"Dr. Lawrence wished Mrs. Cochran to be informed of all the little details of the funeral, as far as possible—as soon as he knew them himself."

"Yes," said Miss Mix, "I am sure the Dean is most considerate."

"Here are the copies of parts of his letters to me, which I have made, so as to be sure that nothing is forgotten. The train arrives to-morrow at 1.45 from New York, and they go at once to the chapel without stopping at the house."

At this point Miss Mix's face, which had been bland with gratified and sympathetic curiosity, became dark with surprise and disapproval.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Lawrence, that not even poor Patty herself is to have a chance to view the remains before the interment?"

Katherine drew her breath sharply.

"The Dean is very sorry about that," she answered, surprised into a sort of apology.

"Well, of course, it is not my place to offer advice when it is not asked," said the other, voluble, almost truculent, in the shock of her own disappointment, "but I must say I can't be responsible for the way Patty takes any such news. Indeed, I don't feel that I can see my way to facing her with it at all."

Katherine turned to her quickly, her face suddenly unveiled by a personal appeal.

"I am sure, Miss Mix, you are too kind a woman

to wish to make anything more difficult for us just now; you are her friend, and you have known the Dean for a great many years. Won't you try to make Mrs. Cochran understand that, far from there being the least disregard for her feelings in this respect, there has been the greatest care to save them. If you will only recall the little that is known of the circumstances of his death, you will see why any other arrangement would have been infinitely more painful to her, even if it had been possible."

Instantly mollified, Miss Mix drew near to share what might be a new tidbit of hitherto withheld and unsavory detail. Her voice dropped to a cautious whisper and she glanced discreetly at Sylvia, who sat drearily inattentive on the other side of the carriage, her eyes and thoughts apparently bent on the end of the whip, which she was trailing among the green maple seeds sifted between the cracks of the cobble-stones. Miss Mix turned to Katherine again.

"I had heard there had to be an inquest," she began again in her gusty whisper, "but I didn't know. Does that mean—? Did they have to——?"

Katherine shrank from her base curiosity in an almost visible recoil, cutting her short, though her voice was too soft to betray the dislike hidden in her reply.

"I am afraid I cannot tell you any more. The Dean himself has preferred to spare me everything except the barest reference. When you have read these extracts from his letters you will know quite as much as I, and will be quite as able to draw the necessary conclusions."

She took the whip in a way that made Sylvia sit up as if she had been found fault with. The brown mare started from a sudden tightening of the reins, Miss Mix drew away from the dashboard in fear for her square-toed slippers. But Katherine's manner had already resumed its former deprecating gentleness.

"And if Mrs. Cochran would really like to see me—" she concluded almost timidly.

"Yes, I understand; I shall let you know," replied Miss Mix, all officious kindness and encouragement again.

"Mamma," said Sylvia as they drove down the street together, "I should not think Mrs. Cochran would like people to talk about her and tell everything, as Miss Mix was doing just now to you. I should think she would almost rather be left alone."

"O Sylvia!" said Mrs. Lawrence, with what was almost a cry of despair and discouragement, "as you grow older you will find that almost anything is forgiven sooner than suspected coldness and want of sympathy."

### XIII

A LITTLE way farther down the street they passed Ethel Porter and Mrs. Chandler walking slowly along together, arm in arm, under the branching maples. Ethel was moving alertly, the well-preserved youth, of which she was justly proud, showing in every line of her supple figure and spirited, erect head. She was twirling and twisting the white lace parasol which lay against her shoulder, and talking earnestly, with all the energy of emphasis which was one of her mannerisms, while her companion listened rather limply, clinging to a sustaining arm, and making no effort to keep in step. They both nodded and smiled, and Ethel waved her parasol as the little carriage went by. At a corner where the street made a bend, and the imposing yellow stone house which had been old Judge Porter's stood empty, facing both ways in its neglected garden, they turned into State Street, the main avenue of Littelton's commerce, a dirty, ill-paved, narrow thoroughfare without trees, where the houses and shops stood close together as they might in a larger town where space was precious, but always sunny, for it stretched east and west; now full of the light and life and movement of a June morning, with a jocund west wind frolicing everywhere after two days of rain.

The street was full of farmers' wagons, up to their hubs in mud from the country roads, and the rough-laid cobble-stones had been hammered into the ground and covered with a layer of black dirt, so that the little phaeton ran more smoothly as it threaded its way through the traffic, though its brightness was soon dimmed by the greasy mud which splashed from every rut and puddle.

They drew up at last before Van Deusen's, the principal provision store and market of the town, an untidy place, with heaps of roughly disposed fruit and vegetables blocking its two narrow doors of entrance, leaves of the ever-marketable cabbage lying about the pavement, with broken pods of the first spring peas. Mrs. Lawrence intrusted the reins to Sylvia and went in under the dingy awnings to the back part of the store, where canned vegetables, bins of dusty crackers, and garden implements hanging in bunches against the walls added further to the confusion of trades.

Sylvia, left sitting out in the sun, was very well pleased watching the people go by to the post-office, which was just across the way. Very soon Mrs. Chandler and Miss Porter appeared round the corner. Sylvia sat up straight and began to sparkle and preen herself, for she had conceived an extravagant fancy for Ethel, and hoped she would come and speak to her before she crossed the street. And, indeed, both the ladies stopped at the curb as they passed.

"Are you waiting for your mother?" said Ethel, smiling kindly at the pretty child. "Where is she? Oh, I see her talking to Mr. Van Deusen in the door-



way! Do look at her, Nannie! Did you ever see a more angelically interested expression, and yet I am sure he is telling her nothing more thrilling than the price of spring vegetables."

Katherine looked up from her examination of the little stream of peas which was falling from a pod to the dirty ground in obedience to an impulse of the large thumb of the old shopkeeper. She caught sight of the little group outside in the sunlight and smiled.

"I suppose you are making fun of me for my absorption in wretched domestic detail. It is quite like you," she said to Ethel, as she stepped over Sylvia to take her place again in the carriage.

"Not at all! I was admiring your hat!" replied the other flippantly. "Well, Sylvia, how about tennis this afternoon? I believe that faithless swain of yours is going to desert us."

"Oh, yes!" said Sylvia innocently. "Poor Stephen! He has a horrid examination at four o'clock. It isn't his fault. It makes him very angry. But Tom will play, if you like. He has plenty of time and he serves nearly as well as Stephen."

"May I have your daughter on the college courts this afternoon?" said Ethel, turning to Katherine. "That infant, Franklin Field, has asked me to play with him, and I am getting too old for singles."

"O Ethel, you will never get old," said Mrs. Chandler, half-complaining. "Each time you come, you begin with a new set."

They all laughed, even Sylvia, who only half-understood.

“Be sure to stop in the garden on your way home. I feel as if I hadn’t seen you at all,” Katherine was beginning, and then cut herself short somewhat abruptly, driving off just as Mrs. Loomis arrived on the curb-stone, after a perilous passage across the muddy street, leaving that lady panting and ponderous and disappointed, looking after the departing carriage.

“What a pity! I crossed on purpose to speak to her. I wanted to ask about the service for Professor Cochran in the college chapel to-morrow. It seems a bad plan to give it any publicity, considering the man’s past record, doesn’t it?”

Mrs. Chandler answered somewhat stiffly, resenting, with inherited feeling, the right of the town to criticise anything the college might think proper.

“Impertinent of her! What business is it of hers who the Dean permits to be buried in the college lot?” she said with more than usual animation, looking after Mrs. Loomis’s receding back.

“Her escape was so well-timed that if it had been any one but Kitty I should have believed she did it on purpose,” remarked Ethel laughing.

“Oh, do you think so?” said Mrs. Chandler absent-mindedly. “Shall you go, Ethel, to the funeral, I mean?”

“Not I. I feel just badly enough about it to run no unnecessary risks of having my feelings lacerated. I am going to spend the day with the Hetheringtons, at Statesburg. Really, I don’t think I could stand another funeral in that college chapel, even if it were

my worst enemy. How can Kitty bear it? I don't wonder she is looking so sad."

"Do you think so? I hadn't noticed it," said Mrs. Chandler in some surprise.

There was a moment's silence between them, till Ethel began again rather abruptly, "I find her very much changed."

"Changed!" echoed the other. "How do you mean? Of course we are all a great deal older."

"Older, yes, of course, though I don't mean that. She still looks absurdly young to be the mother of those great children. And I have seen her sad enough before, Heaven knows! It is not that only. Perhaps it is the contrast. Do you remember when I was here last, Nannie, six years ago? Richard came up, too, for a visit, and we all renewed our youth together and had such a good time! She was just beginning to wear colors again, and come out a little, and there was something about her, I thought then, a sort of radiance in her whole look, a joy and expectancy, and yet surprise that life could be just merry and happy again after all those years in the grave with Tom. It didn't last very long, did it? Certainly there is none of it left now."

"I remember that summer," said Mrs. Chandler, mildly reminiscent. "Yes, now that I come to think of it, we have never been quite the same since. It was very soon after that we began to notice a change in the dear Dean's health."

"Does Kitty ever confess she is worried about him?"

Mrs. Chandler gave her little dry giggle. "No, that isn't Kitty's way. But you can see that he is never off her mind for a minute."

"I wonder what she will do," said Ethel, half-unconscious where she was following her thoughts.

The other answered quickly, "Oh, my dear, she won't stay here a moment! She doesn't really care for it here. Outwardly, of course, she is all that is sweet and loyal to the college and the place and us, but she has never really cared for Littelton, never really taken root here."

"I suppose she has been too unhappy."

There was a tone of reasonable irritation in Mrs. Chandler's voice as she replied, "My dear, what has that to do with it? Every one has to be unhappy somewhere, and for that matter she has been very happy, too: All her married life! Both her children were born here. No, fond as I am of Kitty, I can't help having that little grudge against her. She never opened her heart to us here in Littelton. It is only her duty to the Dean that keeps her here now."

"I suppose she is very comfortably off," remarked Ethel. "Of course Tom could leave her nothing, but she was believed to be something of an heiress when he married her."

"I suppose so. Kitty never speaks about those things. They live very simply, just as the rest of us do. But one can't help seeing that she never has to scrimp about money as we poor people on salaries must." And Mrs. Chandler went on to give instances to show forth a comfortable lavishness in the adminis-

tration of the Dean's household, which she herself, with narrower means, was unable to imitate.

"Mamma," said Sylvia, as soon as the cobblestones had given place to a sandy road, made firm and pleasant for going by last night's rain, and conversation was again possible between them; "mamma, I want to ask you something. Did Professor Cochran commit suicide?"

"Has any one said so?" said Katherine, turning upon her with a somewhat startled attention.

"Not exactly," said Sylvia looking down. "Just little things, and the inquest. I thought there never was an inquest unless a person committed suicide."

"An inquest may be held after any sudden death, and find, as in this case, that it came from natural causes," said Katherine in a tone that imposed silence till she herself chose to break it, which she did at last almost abruptly.

"Have many people spoken to you about Professor Cochran?"

"Oh, no," said Sylvia; "only Marjorie and Jimmy Snell and some of the boys just at first, when they were angry because they were afraid it would put a stop to the Commencement ball."

"And you, too?" said Katherine somewhat bitterly.

"A little, mamma, at first. It seemed so unfair that everything should be spoiled for some one we hardly knew. Then afterward, when it turned out that



it was going to be all right about the ball, we were sorry and took everything back."

"It would be impossible for children like you to know enough about him either to praise or blame correctly," said Katherine in a tone between pride and pain.

Sylvia dropped her eyes and moved her shoulders uneasily, for she thought she was being found fault with. Her mother went on wistfully:

"You speak of hardly knowing him. I suppose you have forgotten that you were ever fond of him."

"No, I haven't," said Sylvia, touched at a tender point. "It was the boys I meant when I said 'we.' I remember very well, of course. It was he who gave me my set of Miss Edgeworth, and taught Tom and me to shoot at a mark in the garden, and was always talking to Tom about West Point, till you told him to stop, for it would make him discontented with going to college here. Why, it was only a little while ago that we all had such fun making paper butterflies for the Christmas-tree, and he was so cross because you wouldn't think his butterfly as pretty as yours. And finally he made a great big one with black feelers and gorgeous blue and gold spots all over its wings, which he insisted upon putting at the very top of the tree. Do you remember that butterfly?"

Katherine shook her head. She had listened with a sort of suspended attention which seemed trembling every moment on the verge of withdrawal, but she let Sylvia go on, uninterrupted, to the very end.

They stopped at last before wide-spread lines of



glass-houses interspersed with patches of shining green, of plants in open frames and flourishing gardens—the nurseries which supplied even the Statesburg florists from their abundance. A boy came out of the office to hold the horse.

“Are you coming in?” said Katherine in some surprise, as Sylvia prepared to follow her out of the carriage.

Sylvia laughed.

“I don’t mind here. It is only shops and errands I hate so.”

The German gardener knew Mrs. Lawrence well. He led them about the different houses and out among the bedding plants, confident that she would care for nothing in the world so much as the sight of hundreds of little plants of a new petunia ready to be sent to market. But to-day, contrary to her usual custom, Katherine wished to see the cut flowers. From these she chose, after some deliberation, some very beautiful, dark-red roses. Sylvia listened with mechanical interest to careful directions as to how they were to be arranged, not stiffly in a florist’s bouquet, but in a soft, loose bunch, with their own leaves. But her interest suddenly sharpened as she heard her mother telling where they were to be sent, and saw her grandfather’s card, with a black dash through the prefixes, given to be fastened on the wire which was to secure them.

“Mamma,” she said, when they were again together in the carriage, “I thought people sent only white or purple flowers for some one who was dead.”

“ So they do, very often, but not always. It depends on what they think the other would like; and Wilfred hated funeral wreaths,” she added, with a facile use of the Christian name of which she was evidently unconscious, and which Sylvia did not even hear, so eager was she to see the brown mare’s head turned for the longer drive.

They had left the town well to the south of them. The road, following the curve of the valley, yet making all the time a sort of sidelong ascent of one of its sloping sides, reached at last the brink of one of the insignificant little watersheds of the pleasant, rolling country. To the east was Statesburg, invisible behind the sand barrens, with their groves of gloomy pines. But there was a break in the roadside to the west which gave a wide glimpse of the Littel valley, with the town and its brown spires, and the tufted trees and square tower of the college lying half-way down its slope, the silver thread of the river, winding with its islands through the narrow flood plain. Opposite were the broad lines of hills, the same hills one saw through the arches of the elms on the college green, but higher, wider, more transparently blue, from this more lofty vantage ground. The Alban Hills they had been named by some classic pioneer of the valley.

Katherine checked her horse and they both sat for a few minutes looking widely out before them in silence, that strange alembic which separates and divides, what was a moment before a unity of intercourse, into its own parts, unknown and unknowing, as if they had never been one.

Katherine spoke first, quite unconscious of the long road by which the words had come to her.

"Your father brought me here the first time he ever took me to drive after we came to Littelton to live."

Sylvia glanced swiftly at her mother from under her eyelashes and wondered to see her speak so calmly and look so tranquil. She herself was always strangely moved by any mention of her father. All through her childhood she had been nourished by simple, touching stories about him, such as would amuse and interest a little child. She felt that she knew him very well and all about him. But as she grew older, as she reached the age that had been her mother's when her father first came into her life, she had become vaguely suspicious of all this surface intimacy so freely bestowed upon her. She longed to know more—more than Katherine, in her shy reserve, could ever tell her of her joy and of her sorrow. And now, as she heard her mother speak so simply of what was so soon to be such utter loss and desolation, she strained to touch the anguish which must so often have dimmed and stained those eyes, now so gravely, purely blue under the arches of their white lids, feeling no comfort that it was long ago, that time had done away the sharpness of regret, for it was the past itself she demanded—the inexorable past. She felt that she would have given her very breath if, by some necromancy, she could bring back the moment of that first drive together, hold those two who loved each other suspended here on the verge of the sunny valley forever, out of the power of the impending disaster; forbid the little

river ever to rise above its shallow banks and overwhelm them with its yellow, separating flood; she herself might never be born, but she hardly felt the pang of her own annihilation, for, by a strange dual consciousness, she seemed to have possession in that golden moment, in virtue of her own deep love and her father's love for her mother.

The mare, feeling her head turned toward home, set off at a good trot down the gradual incline, pulling a little against her mistress's steady hands, flirting bits of the soft, sandy soil into the carriage in her long, free gait. But her pace slackened somewhat as they came to a rise in the road, and then Sylvia, feeling all at once very sad and lonely and far away, put both hands on her mother's arm, all tense and firm from driving. The jealous, human child was dominant in her again and demanded satisfaction.

"O mamma, if he had lived you wouldn't have loved me so much!" she cried.

Katherine disengaged herself and drew quite away to the other side of the carriage.

"Who—what do you mean?" she said, almost fiercely. Then, seeing the child's dismayed and wistful eyes, she caught herself together again, though still trembling from that first touch of a little, soft hand against her privacy.

"Don't be silly, Sylvia!" she said impatiently; and Sylvia was silent, not sulky, but sorrowful and abashed, drooping a little in her corner of the carriage. Katherine turned upon her suddenly with one of her sweet, sidelong glances.

“ Shall we take the short cut through College Lane? Perhaps we shall find some columbine in bloom.”

“ O mamma,” cried Sylvia, between laughing and crying, in the sense that a base advantage was being taken of her injured feelings, “ you always get the better of me! You know if we find any you will ask me to get out and pick it for you, and I shan’t be able to resist you, though picking flowers is the thing I hate most in the world.”

## XIV

WHEN the tennis players stopped in the Dean's garden on their way back from the courts that afternoon Sylvia found Stephen with her mother.

"How did you get on?" she asked with indiscreet directness as he came to meet them.

He made no answer in words, but his looks showed deep dejection.

"I must rush home to dress," said Ethel, "for I am going to a tea party at the Loomis's, all my married friends and their husbands and Dr. Mills to keep me in countenance. Don't you envy me?"

"I am sure you will have a very good time," said Katherine with a polite discretion that made the other laugh.

"Poor Kitty! You are always so pathetically civil about Littelton gayeties; but it is no good. You never take any one in as to your real opinion of them. Strange, isn't it, Mr. Field?"

Franklin smiled his little, cautious, courteous smile. He thought Mrs. Lawrence did not look entirely pleased by the sudden attack upon her.

"Are you coming with us?" he asked Stephen as they turned to go.

"No, I am staying here," answered Stephen out of the depths of gloom.



"Poor old man!" said the tutor in a kindly aside as they all walked down the gravel path to the gate; and Stephen, in reply, muttered between his teeth:

"That boarding-house table is more than a fellow can stand when he is down on his luck. I am glad to cut it to-night."

"Well, stop in my room when you come back, and we will have some 'polly' together," said Franklin almost affectionately. It pleased him to lay aside the formal professorial manner with this senior and treat him on the plane of equality, as one man to another; not difficult under the circumstances, for they were nearly the same age.

"Stephen is going to stay to tea," said Katherine to Sylvia, with a certain gentle warning in her voice which the other understood even as she rejected it, for she had already made up her mind that she was not going to be nice to Stephen, whatever her mother said. It was really too stupid of him to fail in that silly old examination, and she was tired of talking about it, anyway.

She turned her brilliant, hardening eyes upon him as he sat, dejection in every line of his figure, beside her mother on the bench, and answered with a kind of stony cheerfulness:

"Oh, is he? Well, I must go at once and change my tennis things."

He watched her, with wide, expressionless gaze, down the grassy path between the cherry-trees till she was out of sight, and then turned to Katherine dumbly, in such frank, blank, unmodified appeal for sympathy

and protection that she nearly laughed in his face, though she was really very sorry for him.

"Don't expect her to be very kind to you this evening, dear Stephen," she said encouragingly; "I am sure she is really sorry, but she doesn't want to say so."

"Doesn't she?" said Stephen meekly.

"Don't ask her to sympathize with you just at first. Talk about other things and try to be a little cheerful."

"All right," said Stephen sadly; and he seemed to Katherine almost pathetic at tea in his perfunctory attempts at taking an interest in Sylvia's lively chatter with Tom about the tennis and Miss Porter and Franklin Field. Even Sylvia relented at last enough to turn her starry eyes upon him and ask, with something that might at least pass for interest:

"Was the examination very hard?"

Once let loose he galloped away madly on his grievance. It was impossible, outrageous, a paper that no one could have passed, no man in his class, he was sure of it. He turned to Tom.

"You understand how a paper can be hard, darned hard? It breaks you all up, and yet you feel you were a fool not to have made something out of it."

Tom nodded as if he understood perfectly.

"You must say to yourself that you have no one but yourself to blame for not grinding harder at it," Stephen continued; "but this stuff! As soon as I looked at it I saw I had no chance. Why, it was full of things I had never even heard of. Electricity, for instance. My coach never touched anything after the

twenty-second chapter. We didn't have time. And I know the diagram of the path taken by the violet and red rays in the secondary bows comes after that. I can show it to you in the book. You can see how unjust that was, Mrs. Lawrence?" he turned to Katherine. "Remember, it was only elementary physics, only the introduction to physics, the obligatory Junior subject, not the advanced."

"Dear Stephen, I am sure I should have found it all equally impossible," said Katherine, stirred as usual with mild wonder at the strangely buoyant quality of the average masculine mind, which permits it to rise triumphant through four years of obligatory sciences and philosophies, to float at last in the same limpid purity of uninformed ignorance. "But if you are so sure it was an impossible paper, why don't you go to Professor Brauer about it?"

"I did, and he was perfectly nasty and disagreeable. He didn't want to give me the examination in the first place, and I think he is tickled to death that he has stuck me."

"Suppose you go to the Dean about it," said Katherine, suddenly grown serious. "He will be back tomorrow afternoon. I am afraid he will be very tired, but I think he will want to know. He is very much interested in your getting your degree."

"Yes, the dear old fellow! I never should have got as far as this if it hadn't been for his encouragement!"

"Cheer up, Stephen! It is nearly yours!" said Tom, rising from the table and patting him encouragingly on the shoulder. "You hold it already with

one hand and three fingers. One more finger and a thumb and you have it fast, so that no one can take it away from you!"

With an expressive gesture, as if he felt the longed-for parchment even then in his grasp, Tom took his departure to work for his Greek examination at the room of his chum, Bob Merton.

The others went into the garden.

"It is really too cold, but it is so much nicer, and grandfather isn't here to tell us we mustn't," said Sylvia disloyally.

They sat on a garden bench beside a row of lilies all in bud.

"Do you think they will be open for Commencement, mamma?" said Sylvia, touching one of the leaf-fringed stems.

"Not if it stays so cold," answered Katherine, shivering a little, even under the heavy, clinging folds of her long silk shawl.

Sylvia had appropriated another of her mother's wraps, which she especially affected, shimmering and voluminous, with a hood in which she half-concealed herself. Stephen was enchanted with her, and she was flattered and excited to see his querulous depression change to a melancholy much more to her taste, because she felt herself to be the cause. She seemed suddenly older, full of elusive feminine charm, but the look in her eyes was not tenderness, rather the quality of some mischievous feline creature who feels that it has something at its mercy and makes passes into sweetness only to tempt and confuse in rebuff. She found Stephen

easy game. He put his head down at last on the back of the bench with his cheek against Katherine's hand as it lay there in the dusk.

"Nobody is good to me, nobody cares for me but you," he said pathetically.

"Poor Stephen!" said Katherine, withdrawing her hand to pat his smooth, seal-brown hair.

But Sylvia flung herself against her mother's other side and drew her away.

"You mustn't touch her!" she cried, looking across at him, half-laughing, yet half in earnest. "She is my mother and doesn't belong to you in the very least!"

"How can you be so unkind?" said Katherine severely. "I shall send Stephen home if you are not more polite to him."

"I don't care! I wish he would go, if he makes you nice to him and scold me, when I am your child and he isn't," said Sylvia in greater indignation, as she saw Stephen and her mother look at each other and laugh in mutual understanding.

"Wait a moment," said Katherine suddenly, as he turned away, "I want to look at you!"

His smiling brown eyes met hers fairly. The brow and forehead were not wanting in nobility, and the mouth and chin well cut, though a little too heavy. The fault of the face was in the cheeks, which began too soon under the eyes and extended to the very tip of the jaw.

"Well, do you think you can trust me?" he asked, half-laughing.

"In a great many things, I am sure I could trust you," she answered gently.

"You can trust my heart. That ought to be enough."

But one's heart is not always quite enough.



## XV

**T**HAT very day, as soon as she was at liberty after the early dinner, Miss Mix made her way through the afternoon sunlight over the college green to the sealed and shuttered house which had once been Professor Cochran's. On the threshold she met Mrs. Brauer coming out. The two ladies paused a moment to exchange confidences. They had both been good friends to Patty from the very first, perhaps from accident, but perhaps also through genuine kindly feeling. They had taken her part, and had spread, only to contradict, any discreditable stories which were current about her. It was only lately they had begun to feel the inconvenience which must inevitably accompany their earlier partisan attitude; it was only within the last few days they had begun to drop the veil which they had hitherto used so mercifully in their discussion of poor Patty's sufferings and misfortunes to one another. The time had not yet come, though it was fast approaching, when they should feel themselves quite free to throw open to the world the spoils they had been collecting through more than two years of loyalty, intimacy, and discretion.

In the mean time they permitted a very cheerful criticism to intrude itself even in the midst of their real kindness and service for their unfortunate friend—a

very clear recognition of what was grotesque and ignominious in the drama of crude, stupid bereavement, unveiled so recklessly for their benefit. They had found, especially, a sort of dreadful entertainment in the burst of savage jealousy which drove her all about her husband's study, tossing and turning the poor little things he had left behind him, searching his drawers, his closets, everything that had been closed against her during his lifetime; and wherever she met an obstacle in a slowly turning hinge, a closed lock, breaking and tearing and laying open before her with brutal, almost frenzied strength.

"She is at it again," said Mrs. Brauer, in answer to the other's question, as the one coming in and the one going out stood together a moment on the steps, which were still dirty and defaced with the mud of yesterday's storm.

"Now, I wonder what she expects to find?" said Miss Mix.

"You will see she has found one thing that hasn't been any too good for her," returned Mrs. Brauer, with grim meaning, which the other acknowledged with inquiring eyebrows and pursed-up lips.

"She says it's Dr. Mills's medicine," continued Mrs. Brauer, whereat they exchanged deep looks, breaking at last into a subdued giggle, followed by some last words of expiring loyalty.

"Well, if ever there was a woman driven to it!"

"Those who find it in their hearts to blame her had better remember how she was tempted."

Miss Mix went in without knocking to the dis-

honored study where she found Patty sitting crouched together over a heap of papers which she had collected in her lap, whimpering softly to herself as she turned them stupidly over and over. She hardly noticed her friend's presence, lent only a confused and partial attention to her efforts to rouse her to some interest in the next day's requirements. As for the Dean's letters about her husband, she made no effort to take them herself, and evidently was not listening while Miss Mix read some extracts from them aloud to her. All her energies were absorbed in her almost mechanical search of the little heap of papers in her lap. Miss Mix turned her eyes upon them at last with peering interest.

"Now, where did you pick those up?" she said curiously; "and what do you expect to find in them, anyway?"

"I'll find them if they are here," muttered Patty over and over to herself, in a rough, half-strangled voice. "I'll find them!"

She stopped to snatch apart a little packet, fixing its contents with her turbid, rolling eyes, but when she saw nothing but various scrawling, boyish handwritings, bearing a date of long ago, she tossed them furiously to the ground, where they fell and lay in the litter of torn papers, dusty examination books, and old class lists, which were tumbled about her husband's desk.

It was among this heap, however, half-buried out of sight, that Harriet's sharp eyes perceived a long blue envelope, one of many, fastened loosely together with a wide black band. Something about the shape

and color, and the dimly seen handwriting, made her glance back into her lap, where the folded sheets of note-paper Katherine had given her that morning still lay, fresh and new. The others were faded, stained, and worn at the edges, yet there was no doubting that they came from the same hand.

Any one who had been looking on at that moment would have seen a powerful change pass over Harriet's good-natured, coarsely cut face, giving it a new significance, making it strangely ominous and dangerous. Long ago, when she was a girl, peeping among her father's private papers, she had found a letter containing a professional secret. For days she had been stung by it in silence, until finally, unable to resist it any longer, she had rushed out and spread it abroad, whisperingly at first, then more and more recklessly, till there was no one in the town with whom she had not shared it. Her father's reputation never quite recovered from the stab she gave it, though she herself had gone about sobbing, swearing, doing all she could to make people believe that she alone was to blame. Yet even this had not cured her of an almost insane attraction to things written and secret. So when she saw that little packet of half-hidden letters directed in Katherine Lawrence's handwriting to a man whom all the little world of Littelton had believed in love with her before his strange, sudden marriage, she was at first struck dumb, then burned to possess them, to seek out their contents. Patty, with her absurd, suspicious jealousy, would have been only a hindrance to her enjoyment. She must get them without her knowledge.

She sprang up again, and, with a sort of instinct to tempt the other away from where they were lying, went to the window and looked through the cracks of the shutters out on the sunny green.

"How well you can see from here to the tennis courts," she remarked with assumed indifference. "There is Ethel Porter and Sylvia Lawrence and Stephen Dullas, I suppose, though I can't see him. Well, I hope Mrs. Lawrence may get him for Sylvia. She certainly deserves it, the pains she is taking."

She heard, as she had hoped, a heavy, slow movement behind her, a slippered tread across the room; a moment after Patty, too, was standing at her side, peering out between the slats of the shutters. She, too, gazed a little while at the group of boys and girls in their white tennis flannels. It was too far away for more than a confused impression of life and graceful movement, but it was enough to shake Patty's dull lethargy into violent expression again. With a hoarse, hysterical shriek she flung herself back across the room in a great burst of clamorous, unrestrained weeping. It was a long time before Miss Mix's ministrations could reduce her to some measure of tranquillity. She was still hysterical when nurse Wilkinson came in to sit with her a while before supper, leaving the other lady free to go back to her household duties.

But Miss Mix did not take her departure without transferring the little packet on the floor to her own voluminous pocket. It would have been safer left where she found it, safer even in the hands of Patty Cochran herself, anywhere, indeed, than in Miss Mix's



keeping, for that little lady possessed a merciless, small intelligence for her neighbors' affairs, great skill for commonplace deduction, combined with a singular lack of delicacy and discretion, and a rapid, racy style of narration which held her audience almost against their will and made her an ideally excellent scandal-monger. She lost no time in making herself mistress of the papers so accidentally fallen into her hands.

Ensconced in her little upstairs sitting-room, the door closed on all intruders, she prepared to make the utmost use of these helpless witnesses, to wrest from them all the secrets of a relation she suspected between people she disliked. And in fact it lay open before her, too simply self-revealing to need surmise or invention to supply the missing links.

The packet contained, evidently, every scrap of Katherine's writing that Wilfred had ever possessed, even dinner cards written in her hand, addresses, a sheet of note-paper with her own name scribbled across the end, and every note and letter he had ever received from her. There was the shy, formal thanks for his wedding present, in a still unformed girlish hand. There was also the first little note written him after her husband's death, telling him that she was glad it was he who had been chosen to fill that place, and that she would see him if he came in the afternoon, ending: "But please don't speak to me about him, for I can't quite bear it yet." There were others, so purely formal and conventional as to be quite without value; others more familiar; a few, a very few, that were nothing less than love-letters, intimate, tender, more than ten-



der, confident in a relation of which she made no concealment, for which there was no need of concealment except her own inherent shrinking from the publicity of discussion. Till the "Dear Wilfred . . . I understand and I forgive. Please be good. K. D. L." Undated. There was nothing else to show the severance of his marriage. And, indeed, no more was needed. Long before she had finished, Miss Mix's eyes were glistening and blinking with satisfied curiosity.

"So he jilted her!" she said at last, half-aloud. "Well, I never would have guessed that!" She gave vent to sudden wide-mouthed laughter. "Kitty Lawrence, with all her superior airs! Well, I never would have guessed that!" She said it again, adding then, with new emphasis, as a new thought struck her, "There are some people in this town whose faces I'd like to see if they knew it, that's all."

She returned to the perusal of the letters again, reading them all over to the very end, pausing long to decipher the places where the paper was so yellow and stained as to be almost illegible, chuckling audibly at any word or expression which the very universality of love has permitted most easily to be vulgarized by the understanding of the eavesdropper.

It was only after she had made herself entirely mistress of their contents that she began to consider what was to be her next step in the disposal of property to which even her facile morality could not give her the slightest permanent claim. She was by no means an unkind woman according to her lights. As her friends were in the habit of saying about her: "She wouldn't

willingly have hurt a fly." And now, as she communed with herself, she made up her mind that she wouldn't give the letters back to Patty. "So jealous as she was of him, and she never could abide Mrs. Lawrence. She might do some harm." She even contemplated handing them back at once to Katherine. "After all, she has more right to them than any one else, now that he is dead and gone, and left them behind. I warrant she will be glad to get hold of them again." And Miss Mix laughed again, this time a little maliciously.

For a moment she mused on her possible interview with Katherine; what she herself would say; how the other would answer; till she was checked by a pang of regret at the thought of the too prompt relinquishment of the heap of papers in her lap.

"I've a good mind to run over with them after tea to old Miss Mills, and see what she will say to them. It won't do a bit of harm. I can trust her, as I would myself, not to say anything about it to any one else!"

This was her final decision, but she did not get across the street to old Miss Mills. She was delayed after tea in the boarding-house parlor, by little Miss Schuyler, with a complaint about a recrudescent cobweb which had appeared in the corner of her room for the last few days. Miss Mix listened good-naturedly, even accompanying her upstairs to be shown the very corner in which the insect had made its lair, that she might give proper instructions to the housemaid to seek the creature out and kill it in its tracks the next morning. Then she sat down on the edge of a high

chair near the door, her hands on her knees, her feet spread out to preserve her balance, and watched Miss Schuyler fluttering about her small possessions, collecting wraps and making preparations for an evening to be spent on the side piazza.

There is a certain quality in every born story-teller and scandal-monger, an instinctive appreciation for strange, inordinate effects produced by contrast on the smug, commonplace expressions of friends and neighbors, which no doubt adds very much to their inability to keep any piece of extraordinary information long to themselves. It is certain that Miss Mix's natural inclination to impart what she knew wherever it would be listened to was increased a thousand-fold by that instinct toward the grotesque, fed, in this case, by the obvious incongruity between the little spinster's bustling, innocent activity, and the effect a word from her might quickly produce. She was not disappointed in the result. Miss Schuyler dropped her heap of shawls, sank into her easy-chair, her wrinkled, faintly tinted face growing agitated and confused in a very agony of shrinking curiosity.

"My dear Miss Mix," she quavered at last, breaking in on the other's endless flow of words, "you speak of letters! Are you sure you are not mistaken in their character? I cannot believe that Mrs. Lawrence, with her reticence, her nobility of nature, her dignity, could have written anything in the nature of love-letters to a married man like Professor Cochran."

Miss Mix's cheeks were flushed, her eyes were sparkling with mischievous excitement.

"He was not married when she wrote them. Do you want to see for yourself?"

"No! no! I haven't the right! Dear Miss Mix, I hope you are not going to show them to anybody. Think of her sensations at having her innermost emotions known to unsympathetic outsiders!"

Miss Mix broke into a great laugh.

"You needn't look so scared. There is no harm in them. It is only a joke to think how quiet and demure she kept through it all, never giving any one to suspect how she felt about him. Don't say anything to any one about what I have told you. I wouldn't have it get back to Patty for the world."

She only waited to receive Miss Schuyler's trembling vows of secrecy, then went off gayly to her own room to get her knitting to take over to old Miss Mills.

On the way, however, she caught sight of Franklin Field going upstairs to his third-story room. He had not been one of those invited to Mrs. Loomis's tea party and was finding time a little heavy on his hands, deprived of Miss Porter's sprightly conversation after tea. He looked so demure and secret that Miss Mix was filled at once with a desire to confide in him. Besides, he was a new-comer, more open to unprejudiced impressions, not entangled by any special affection or admiration for Katherine, and, moreover, she had already recognized him instinctively as one of those hybrid links through which information can be most easily conducted from one sex to the other.

"O Mr. Field!" she cried. "Come in! come in! I want to show you something!"

He followed wonderingly into her little upstairs sitting-room. It was some time before he came out again, to continue his progress up to his own third story.

“Don’t breathe a word of what I’ve told you to any one,” said Miss Mix earnestly, as she dismissed him at the door. But he did that very evening, later, when Stephen came home from the Lawrences, and stopped to share a bottle of Apollinaris, the young men’s innocent tipple before they parted for the night.

## XVI

**M**ISS MIX came back from marketing next morning somewhat later than usual, her little black silk bag on her arm, her bonnet strings loosened so as to show the hole under her chin, between her short, fat neck and her ample bosom. She walked buoyantly, almost bouncingly, as is often the case with active, fat people, and her square, downy face wore a broad smile of ample satisfaction, as though the world were going well with her.

She was rather in a hurry, for she had been delayed in the town and there was much to be done at home, with dinner half an hour earlier, if she wished to be of any use to her friend Patty Cochran before the funeral that afternoon. But just as she was closing the gate behind her she caught sight of Mrs. Brauer, coming along from the college with old Mrs. Jenkins, through the checkered shade of the maples. Mrs. Brauer was wrapped, as usual, in spite of the warmth of the day, in her striped blanket shawl; the other lady was clothed in shabby black, with a round shade hat to keep the sun out of her eyes, and carried her head with a high, sidelong lilt, which showed the whole length of her smooth, white face, its pale eyes and close-lipped, acid smile.

Mrs. Jenkins was the wife of the man who had



once been professor of engineering in Littel College, struck useless many years since by paralysis, and retired on half-salary, but still living in the cold old house which had always been his, quite the other side of the college grounds. No one saw much of her in the winter; she was old and rather feeble and could walk with difficulty over the slippery roads, but with the first warm day of spring she always emerged from her little hollow, white and bloated with the poisonous hate of all things and persons better off than she, which had nourished her solitude, but glad to mingle with her kind again, and eager to hear anything to the disadvantage of her friends and neighbors. And though, bringing with her as she did, everywhere and always, the blight of personal grievances and the bitterness of fancied wrongs, she was not a person anywhere warmly welcomed, still she was received with an anxious and propitiating politeness arising half from pity, half from fear of her rancorous tongue, which was known to spare no one who might have ever so little offended her.

Miss Mix retraced her steps, and as they passed the gate she was standing there to greet them.

"How is Patty this morning?" she asked Mrs. Brauer, who might be presumed to have just come from the house of mourning.

"Very quiet and dull, poor soul!" replied the other lady. "I left her just now. Nurse Wilkinson was with her. She seemed only half herself. I don't think she has taken it in at all that the funeral is to be this afternoon. Of course it is hard realizing it without the remains in the house. It is very hard for her, too,

not a soul belonging to her to keep her company. I told her she could count on us, at least, to go with her to the chapel."

But Miss Mix answered almost flippantly. Her attitude toward her whilom friend had suffered a certain disarrangement in the flood of new and more exciting interests on which she was lately become embarked. She hardly noticed Mrs. Brauer's reply in her haste to exchange her new lamp for her friend's old one.

"Poor Patty! She would not be so quiet if she knew what I carried away from under her nose yesterday afternoon after all her trouble of looking for them. But I didn't dare to leave 'em, seeing the state she was in about it. I thought I would just look them over first to see if there was anything to harm anybody in them. And I am glad now I did. You never can guess what I found, and yet I don't know why not. It stands to reason that Patty must have had some good cause for the way she always hated Mrs. Lawrence."

It was not reluctance or hesitation to impart all she knew to these two fresh recipients of this last exquisite piece of gossip; it was nothing more than the natural instinct of a story-teller that made Miss Mix stop and draw breath a moment before proceeding. When she began again her voice had dropped to the veiled accents of the professional violator of secrets, and the others only had to draw a little nearer to hear the extreme limit of what she had to tell. As she listened Mrs. Brauer's pale, triangular countenance began

to twitch nervously in the strain of her various emotions—crude surprise, gratified animosity for a woman who had stirred her thin blood once or twice, however involuntarily, with vulgar jealousy, and then a flame of excitement, a light of mean, clear-sighted conviction which brushed the other's clumsy conclusions aside as if they were cobwebs. Her words broke in, at last, harsh and rancorous across Miss Mix's excited volubility.

"Do you mean that she was ready to take him? With her position and all that money? And still he went off and married Patty, without a cent? Then depend upon it, Miss Mix, there is more truth than Patty would allow in all those stories of how she got him."

But Miss Mix was too much interested in the immediate subject of discussion to be deflected into vain surmises about Patty Cochran.

"Take him!" she echoed, and began to fumble among the contents of the little black bag she carried. "Just listen to this, and you will see how ready she was to take him!

"'You flatter me by finding a hundred things in me which I do not possess. But you are putting your cleverness to an extravagant use when you tell me you love me for the very stupidest of my defects, my helplessness among people who don't understand or like me. Wilfred dear, how did you come to understand me so well? You say it is your love for me that tells you; but I can't quite agree with you there, for love can be very deep, yet not at all discerning.'"

Miss Mix interrupted herself abruptly.

"That isn't the one I thought. There is another here that is much plainer. If you come up into my sitting-room now, I will show you the others. I have them here in my bag."

Mrs. Brauer pressed forward at once, but Mrs. Jenkins, who had stood all this time in her usual attitude, remote yet attentive, now made as if she would continue her way downtown.

"Don't go, Mrs. Jenkins," said Miss Mix hospitably; but seeing the other would not be prevented, she changed her invitation into an equally cordial leave-taking.

"Well, I shall see you at the funeral. Mrs. Brauer and I are going to sit with Patty, but I shall look for you among the faculty as I come in, Mrs. Jenkins."

The other lady drew herself up and answered grimly: "Possibly, though we shall be obliged to come early if we expect to find seats in the reserved pews. At Mrs. Curtis's funeral, if you remember, my husband was crowded out from his rightful place among the professors, and was obliged to take a seat in the side aisle with the freshmen."

She gathered her cloak about her for departure, shaking, as it were, the dust of the past insult from her sombre skirts. She hated the Dean because he was still in the enjoyment of honor and office, though he had been for many years her husband's friend, and though even now it was only by his influence and generosity that Mr. Jenkins was retained on half-salary in one of the college houses, long after disease had

taken away his faculties and made him incapable of performing his duties. She hated Katherine because it was Tom Lawrence who had taken her husband's place. And even death had not brought forgiveness for the imagined injury. These unconcealed animosities, even more than her own solitary habits, had ended in making her so extraordinary a visitor at the Dean's house that Katherine might be forgiven some surprise as she came down the hall, her hands filled with flowers from the garden, and saw the old woman on the steps. But Mrs. Jenkins addressed her at once with an unusual degree of acid friendliness.

"I feel myself rather faint with walking through the hot sun, my dear. I wonder whether you will let me come in and sit a little while in your parlor?"

She suffered herself to be conducted into the cool, flower-filled drawing-room, refusing, however, all offered refreshment except a fan and a seat on the wide old sofa near the window. And Katherine remained beside her, attending to her wants with a soft, unsmiling courtesy, not quite able, however, to keep a certain wonder out of her eyes, very coldly sweet under their wide arches, over the strange quality of a mind which could permit this visitor's presence, for any conceivable reason not an insult, in the house of the man she had for years been doing her best to injure by every means in her power.

It was Mrs. Jenkins who broke the silence at last:

"Shall you be at the funeral this afternoon?"

Katherine drew herself together with an air of offended gentleness. There were so many things, so



many obvious things, which Mrs. Jenkins might mean just then. She answered with a certain deliberation:

“Why should I not be at Professor Cochran’s funeral?”

Mrs. Jenkins replied with her usual acid smile:

“Oh, my dear, don’t think that I have come here to criticise anything Dr. Lawrence chooses to do in this college. In this matter, at least, he has suffered as much as any one else from the consequences of his indifference to my husband’s advice in the appointment of his successor. No, I was going by, and I thought I would stop in to tell you—” There was just a thread of hesitation in the implacable old voice, but only for a moment. “To warn you,” she resumed, “that you had better try to get back your letters to Professor Cochran, before Harriet Mix hands them over again to his widow, or you may have difficulty in regaining possession of them at all.”

There was a moment of almost breathless silence.

“My letters!” said Katherine. Her eyes had grown wide and strained in an expression that had no room for anything but blank, almost stunned amazement. She made no effort to defend herself, to conceal herself, to gather round her the cloak of her usual impenetrable reserve. She sat perfectly still, perfectly helpless, letting Mrs. Jenkins drive home the blow as fast and as far as she chose.

“He kept them, then! He kept them!” she murmured to herself, in a voice almost inaudible in her pathetic, crushing bewilderment: “I can’t believe it.”

“You had better believe it, my dear,” replied Mrs.



Jenkins grimly. "Mrs. Cochran found them among her husband's papers, and Harriet Mix is now busy scattering their contents broadcast through the town."

But Katherine, though she remembered it in its own time, did not even wince under this new blow. She seemed stunned, blinded, incapable of understanding anything else after the stupendous fact that Wilfred had kept the letters she had written him, and died without destroying them. She accompanied Mrs. Jenkins to the door with perfectly mechanical formality, standing blank and dumb before her last words of leave-taking, but every chord and fibre of her being seemed to be repeating, voiceless:

"He kept them! I can't believe it!"

Mrs. Jenkins walked away with her long, gliding step, her pale face held a little higher and a little more sideways than usual. No one would ever have accused her of having done a good action; no one would have suspected her of anything but malicious curiosity in the change of plan which had made her stop at Katherine Lawrence's on her way home that morning. But it is not entirely impossible that the act was impelled by a kind of curdled kindness from a proud, secretive nature which had suffered its own humiliations, who felt that another might be glad to be warned in time that her friends' eyes were upon her.

Sylvia running in a few moments afterward, from a morning spent in playing croquet with the small Brownells, found her mother standing alone in the middle of the room.

"O mamma!" cried she, "I just met Mrs. Jen-

kins at the corner. Has that horrid old woman been here? What did she want?"

Mrs. Lawrence did not answer immediately, but slowly, after a moment, as if recalling herself from some very great distance:

"Mrs. Jenkins, did you say? Yes, she has been here."

She remained standing, looking dimly in front of her, while Sylvia rattled on unheeding, telling how many games they had played and who had won and how hot it was, and yet how she wanted to play tennis in the afternoon but there was no one to play with, because every one was going to the funeral.

"The funeral!" echoed her mother, raising her head with an air of startled interest.

"Yes; Professor Cochran's, you know. And it doesn't do any good that it is a half-holiday, for Tom and all my especial friends are to be pall-bearers because of the fraternity."

But Katherine had relapsed into her state of dreamy inattention.

After a moment she went mechanically across the room to the table near the window and began to readjust the bowls and vases of flowers that stood there, carefully withdrawing a faded leaf or flower here and there and putting in its place one from the fresh ones she had just brought from the garden. Suddenly both her hands fell on the table beside the flowers.

"I can't bear it! I cannot do it!" she said, half under her breath, with a gesture of her head, as if in denial of something too painful to be demanded of her.

Then she went on quietly arranging the flowers. Sylvia came and stood beside her.

"Mamma, why should I go?" she began again. "I hate funerals! I don't see why I should go when I have nothing to do with it. I suppose you will say it is out of respect, but——"

"No, dear child," answered Katherine with a sort of expressionless gentleness, "there is no reason for your going if you don't wish it."

"Are you?" asked Sylvia, somewhat disappointed at having her grievance thus rudely snatched away from her.

Katherine was gathering up the fragments of stems and fallen petals which littered the table where she had been rearranging the vases. She went on with her occupation for a few seconds without answering.

"Yes," she said at last, quite without emphasis or comment.

"Oh, I suppose I'd better go too, then," said Sylvia, grumbling. "Marjorie is, and there will be nothing else to do."

But Katherine had gone out of the room, carrying her little heap of fragments with her. She came back almost immediately.

"Sylvia, have you gone upstairs? Don't take off your hat, I want you to carry a note for me down to Miss Mix's."

"Yes, mamma," said Sylvia absently. She had found a new magazine and was so absorbed in its contents that she did not notice how long a time went by before she was roused by a sudden movement from her

mother, who had been writing at the Dean's table. She now arose to her feet, tearing decisively and crumpling together in her hand the letter she had just finished.

"It is no use! I can't! It has to go without," she said half under her breath. "Never mind, Sylvia, it doesn't matter about the message."

## XVII

**I**T was one of those beautiful, brilliant afternoons when the sky seems especially blue and boundless, and the great, sailing white clouds cast moving shadows on the waving grass in the meadows, when the air is full of the perfume of uncut hay, when all the summer can still be felt rushing up the circle of the year toward that brief, perfect moment that precedes and ushers in its slow decay. The life of the season went on inexorably, but the life of the college had paused just this one afternoon, in virtue of its humanity, to pay its brief, perfunctory respects to death.

The recitation-rooms were closed, the athletic field was deserted, the great bell that marked the hours from the squat tower of the library tolled now to assemble the students to the college chapel, toward which came from all directions little groups of young men who were still laughing and murmuring to one another in subdued voices as they jostled into position in the long black line that was gradually lengthening outside.

Within, the seats reserved for the faculty and their families were rapidly filling up. Sylvia, sitting beside her mother in the Dean's pew, very near the front, looked round her furtively, with half-awed curiosity. The interior of the chapel looked somehow strange and unfamiliar, with its mourning decorations of drooping

boughs of white syringa, white June lilies, and the great, handsome wreath sent by the Adelphic Society, of which Wilfred Cochran had been a member. As her eyes fell upon this last, her mother's words, half-heard and half-forgotten, came back to her: "Wilfred hated funeral wreaths," and she was stirred with dim wonder where all that part of him was gone which had hated and loved and died before they came here to bury his body.

She was conscious of the same strangeness and unreality in the faces and gestures of her friends and every-day acquaintances who came in quietly, by twos and threes, taking their seats near by. She tried to catch Marjorie's eye, as she sat by her father and mother, just across the aisle, looking very pretty and grown-up in a fresh lilac muslin and a black hat with a long, curling feather. But Marjorie kept her eyes fixed straight in front of her, with an expression almost rigid in its solemn, decorous expectancy, and would not return her glance.

Mrs. Jenkins and her feeble, shuffling old husband had found a place to the left and a little behind them. He sat silent and abstracted in his corner, blankly oblivious to all that was going on around him, though the constant flicker, and twitching, paralytic movement always trembling on his lips and eyelids, gave an air of strange, fictitious intelligence to the sad, noble old mask of feature which hid now only the emptiness of a ruined brain.

Mrs. Jenkins leaned forward and spoke to Mrs. Chandler. She then turned and entered into a long



and absorbed conversation with old Mrs. Sears and her daughter, who sat behind her. The sibilant buzz of her s's against her false teeth was distinctly audible to Sylvia where she sat, and ended by irritating her, strained as she was by the solemn stillness of expectancy all about her. She looked at her mother to see if she also was annoyed at it, and finding her sitting almost breathlessly still, apparently impassive, gazing straight in front of her, wondered vaguely what she was thinking of.

Then came the echoing noise of many feet on the wooden floor as the classes filed in, one after another, and took their places in the space reserved for them. One after another the black-coated figures poured in, till it seemed impossible that the chapel could hold them all. The ushers hurried to and fro, crowding them more and more closely in the benches. At last they stopped coming. They stood for a moment motionless in their serried black ranks, and then subsided, with a final crash, into their places.

There was another moment of expectancy, till the tall, old Dean, in his doctor's gown, came slowly up the aisle with one of the city clergymen—Dr. Brimmer—beside him. Then followed a little delay and bustle, while two of the college workmen and the undertaker's assistant hurried to and fro, making some alteration in the arrangement of the trestles standing near the reading-desk. Sylvia started nervously and slipped her hand into her mother's, for she heard a rustle and noise as if the other half of the double door at the other end of the chapel was being pushed open to let something

in, and she suddenly found herself invaded with unexpected, almost choking, agitation. She heard a sound on the wooden floor as of feet moving very slowly, very unsteadily, under some heavy burden. Faltering, uncertain, the little procession made its way up the aisle, passing at last so close to Sylvia that she could have put her hand out and touched them. Tom, Bob Merton, Stephen, and the other lads she knew so well. She could hear their tightened breath and see them stagger and totter and sway together under the heavy weight they bore. She bit her lips together to keep herself from sobbing, in a strange, unreasonable resentment that it should be they who were bending under a sorrow that was not their own, that she should have to shrink and wince at a hurt that really did not touch her.

Mrs. Cochran followed closely, a shapeless bundle of black, between her two still faithful supporters, Mrs. Brauer and Miss Mix, who even in the midst of their attentions to her still found time to cast about them glances of recognition, nods and gestures explanatory of the condition of the principal mourner, as befitted the position of confidential friend.

But when they had taken their places in the very front seat, in the very shadow of the great black coffin, Mrs. Brauer twisted herself round so as to look behind her. To and fro over the well-filled pews went her little, peering, thin-lidded eyes, till they stopped and rested, for a perceptible moment, on the place where Sylvia was beside her mother. Mrs. Lawrence sat erect against the stiff back of the narrow pew, her face a

little raised, her wide-open blue eyes as still and cold as a mountain lake, and gave no sign of consciousness when Mrs. Brauer looked or when she looked away.

The old Dean's beautiful, thrilling voice began the burial service, and Sylvia felt herself more and more invaded with poignant emotion—that touching, wistful emotion of the young, which comes for nothing and goes for nothing, that shakes and thrills and moves often to passionate tears, that has no certain cure because it has no reason. She was frightened to feel herself over and over on the verge of weeping, and hung her head low upon her breast lest any one should see how much she was moved. But her mother, except for the involuntary start she gave when she felt Sylvia's fingers close on hers, sat quite impassive, looking straight in front of her with a gaze in which even the most remorseless scrutinizer could detect no sign either of sorrow or pride or resentment or regret. Only a faint, almost disdainful smile was drawn across her lips, like a veil for protection between the vulgar, curious world around her and her own deeply wounded but unalterable reserve.

The solemn service went on to the end. The little band of youths approached to resume their burden. Then there was a gasp and groan of hysterical excitement as Mrs. Cochran, who had hitherto been sitting dumbly, sunk together behind her heavy veil, suddenly collapsed and had to be supported out with difficulty, an unmanageable, struggling heap.

“O mamma, how horrible it was!” whispered Syl-

via as she followed Mrs. Lawrence through the side door which gave immediate access to the Dean's garden. All the rest of the world was pouring out of the main entrance on their way to the college burying-ground. There was a pleasant feeling of solitude, silence, and repose among the roses and lilies of the little garden, basking in the golden light of afternoon.

Mrs. Lawrence sank down into the Dean's lounging-chair and leaned her head against its sloping back, closing her eyes for a moment, with a long breath of infinite weariness. Sylvia dropped upon the small garden bench at her side and leaned her arms across her knee.

"Oh, if she hadn't cried and screamed that way at the end!" she began again. "It sounds in my ears yet as if I should never stop hearing it!"

But Katherine sat as if she was not listening. When she did speak at last, it was with a sort of touching irrelevancy.

"How blue the sky is!"

She did not want to talk of what they had just been doing. She did not even want to think, but just lie back in the great chair and look at the flowers in her own garden, and feel her little daughter safe beside her.

"It is lovely out here, Sylvia," she said almost plaintively. "Let us not go in. Let us sit here till some one comes to call us. Look at that eglantine over there. Isn't it wonderful that a single bush can bear so many flowers?"

But Sylvia did not want to look at the eglantine or be diverted in any other way from talking about her late impressions.

"Mamma!" she began again seriously, leaning both elbows on her mother's knee and looking up into her face. "I wish you would tell me why they make funerals so unnecessarily painful. They would be bad enough if they were as short and simple as possible, but it seems to me that everything is done to play upon one's feelings. Everything happens as if it were trying to upset one's self-control. It is as though they all wanted to make one scream and cry, as Mrs. Cochran did at the end."

Katherine smiled absently down into the vivid little face raised to hers.

"I suppose they are meant to give one comfort," she said at last, with an effort of attention, seeing that Sylvia still demanded an answer.

"Comfort!" echoed the child indignantly. "How can it be comfort to have the thing that grieves one ground in and repeated over and over, in as many painful ways as possible?" She broke off to begin again almost immediately.

"If I had cared for him! If it had really been a loss! Mamma, did it comfort you?"

"Me!" said Katherine, drawing a long breath.

"Yes. I mean when papa died?" Sylvia looked down and grew slowly pink with feeling.

"Oh!" said Katherine, leaning back in her chair again, and half-closing her eyes. She looked up at last dimly.

"Perhaps so. It is very hard to tell. One is comforted finally, I know, by little things."

There was a moment's silence which Sylvia broke again: "Mamma, do you know what I mean by the abasement of sorrow?"

"No," said Katherine, looking at her with faint amusement.

"I mean what Mrs. Cochran was doing this afternoon. Sorrow ought to be always beautiful and stately and dignified, but she was making it shameful."

Mrs. Lawrence smiled, a little, painful smile.

"Poor Mrs. Cochran! Let us grant her the right to grieve for her husband in any way she thinks fit."

"But she hasn't the right," said Sylvia earnestly. "Not as long as there are other wives and other husbands. I felt all the time, dear mamma, that in her very presence there, she was an insult to you."

Katherine broke into a little breath of laughter.

"O Sylvia, what a fanciful child you are! How came you to think that, my baby?"

She bent down and kissed her little daughter's hair, for Sylvia had hidden her face in her embarrassment. When she spoke again, however, it was with an effort which made her voice unsteady.

"Dear child, you have a habit—I catch you at it often—of idealizing what I may be feeling at times and seasons which you believe have painful associations for me. You are wrong in thinking they always have power to make us suffer as we did at first. Life would be unbearable if they did, for in time nearly everything comes to have some painful association; and Sylvia



dear, I don't think it is wise ever to try to follow another person's sufferings too closely. It doesn't do any good, rather the reverse. It often unfits you for the demand, a real demand the person you love would make upon your sympathy. I—you—" She hesitated desperately before Sylvia's wondering eyes, and they both started, and Katherine drew herself together quickly, behind the proud shyness which had so nearly let her go, as the gate clicked on its latch and Marjorie Chandler came into the garden.

## XVIII

MARJORIE, seeing mother and daughter together, stopped, hesitated, and made as if she would have retreated, but when she heard Sylvia call after her in quite her usual manner, she turned back and came forward rather shyly.

"I—I am afraid I am disturbing you. I thought—I wanted Sylvia. But it really doesn't matter."

"We weren't doing anything," said Sylvia innocently. "I was only talking to mamma. What do you want?"

"I thought perhaps you would come with me to the Old Woman's Home with the flowers mamma sent over for the chapel."

"Isn't it rather warm?" said Katherine, almost wistfully; but Sylvia, though without any great enthusiasm, had already scrambled to her feet.

"I suppose I might as well. There is nothing else to do," she said with youthful frankness.

"Would you rather she didn't go?" asked Marjorie, looking at Mrs. Lawrence with a kind of shy interest; but Katherine shook her head.

"No, no. I only thought the walk across the fields would be rather hot. I am going into the house, dear." She said this to Sylvia, and went away slowly across

the grassy path under the cherry-trees, leaving the two young girls alone.

"Doesn't your mother look beautiful?" said Marjorie with a sort of awed respect as she gazed after her. Sylvia laughed.

"What made you so funny and solemn to her just now? You are not a bit like yourself this afternoon. Is it because you have been to a funeral?"

"I thought I might be interrupting. I thought she might be talking to you."

"So she was, but that didn't matter. We always talk when we are together."

"Yes, but I meant—" The other hesitated and grew a little confused before her friend's perfectly matter-of-fact manner, concluding at last rather lamely: "I mean this especial afternoon. You know what I mean, Sylvia. You are only pretending you don't, but there is no use pretending any longer. Everybody knows."

"I don't know the least bit in the world what you're talking about," said Sylvia bluntly.

"What! Not that your mother and Professor Cochran have been in love for years and years, long before he was married, and she must be feeling dreadfully now he's dead?"

"What nonsense!" said Sylvia angrily.

"It is not nonsense. I overheard Miss Mix talking about it to mamma this morning, and I thought of course you had known all this time, though they were so surprised. They said they never would have guessed except for the letters. Don't you know about it? Then

she did not let you know on purpose. O Sylvia, I am sorry I told. Please don't let anybody know I told."

"Stop, please!" said Sylvia suddenly. "I don't believe it, but I don't want to talk about it."

They had reached the chapel door. At the foot of the steps, where it must have slipped and fallen from the coffin in its slow descent, lay a bunch of deep red roses. Sylvia stood still and drew in her breath. Then she turned upon Marjorie with a burst of passion which rendered that serious damsel quite speechless.

"You have no right to tell me such things. Do you hear me? Whether they are true or not, and they are not. I am furious with you. No, don't speak to me!" she cried with such a lightning flash that the other's words of self-exculpation died on her lips. "I won't listen to another word, and I am going home. Please let me alone."

She rushed away, leaving Marjorie very much alarmed at the effect of her own indiscretion, but too much in awe of Sylvia's temper to make any effort to follow her.

"I don't see why she is so angry, if she doesn't believe it's true," she said plaintively to herself as she prepared to carry out her mother's behests alone. But if she had understood, she would have seen that Sylvia's anger was all the fiercer because she did believe it, because she knew that it was true. For Sylvia was still such a child that she had not learned to be hurt without being angry with some one, Marjorie first,

and most openly, because she was the nearest—the messenger. But deep in her heart her anger was not so much against Marjorie as against the one person in the past with whom all anger had been blameworthy, and connected with wrong-doing and punishment—her mother. It gave her no satisfaction to assert her right to it now, for every reason which added justice to her resentment only increased her sense of bewilderment and disaster.

She had turned instinctively to her grandfather's study, which she knew would be deserted at that hour, because she wished to be alone, to collect herself, to try to understand all the bearings of this new discovery which concerned herself, only herself, for it was a long time before her simple selfishness permitted her to reach conclusions of suffering involved in it for any one besides herself. Deeply hurt, jealous and humiliated by the sudden realization of the comparatively insignificant position she had held in her mother's heart, where she had long believed herself first, as soon as she found herself alone she could not refrain from a burst of angry weeping. But she was too proud to cry very long. After a little while she grew very still, sitting at her grandfather's table, her chin on her hand, staring out in front of her, absorbed in miserable, passionate thinking, not sparing herself one detail of past, present, or future which would help her to realize the utmost consequences of her disillusionment, as if in this way she could measure and grow acquainted with her sudden misfortune. And here she showed her inexperience, for sorrow cannot be learned all at once,

and by violence, as it were. Its effects are never the work of a single moment, or even a single hour. No prescience of imagination can tell us what it is going to be to us. For it teaches us one day after the other, as each shows us some things worse, but others better, bringing as alleviations what we had told ourselves would be only added torture, and striking us down unawares with the added pain of things we had forgotten to count in at all.

So time passed and still Sylvia sat alone, uncomfor-  
ted, though more and more invaded with youthful  
impatience of her unaccustomed state, and she was  
beginning to wish for her mother, as if she had been  
long parted from her, though at the same moment  
she found herself trembling and shrinking from the  
thought of ever seeing her again, when all at once the  
sound of voices and steps in the outer room made her  
spring to her feet and look about her for means of  
escape.

But the Dean's study was a sort of cul-de-sac. She  
had to stand and meet the intruders whoever they  
might be, trusting to her erectness of attitude and the  
courage of her lifted head, to conceal the depths of  
the wretchedness from which she had just risen. It  
was her grandfather himself, followed by Franklin  
Field and Stephen Dullas, who came into the room  
and it would have been easy to take flight as soon as  
they entered, for the Dean did not notice her at all,  
nor did Stephen, hurrying in after him, pale and pom-  
pous with anxiety. But her very surprise at the latter's  
disregard of her presence, caused her to linger and



hesitate, to find out what was the reason of his ungal-lant conduct. The Dean looked worried and excited. There were two spots of color high up on his furrowed cheeks and deep caverns round his eyes. He was speaking impatiently almost irritably to Franklin as he entered.

“Just come in here a moment, Field. I can give you those lists immediately, I believe.”

He began to rummage through the careful piles of paper collected on his desk, saying in the mean time to Stephen: “Well, boy, what is it? I didn’t understand you just now.”

Of course! As soon as he spoke she remembered. It was Stephen’s anxiety about his degree which had driven him so soon into her grandfather’s presence, which absorbed him so entirely now that he could see and think of nothing else. Could it have been only yesterday that they had all been discussing it in the garden?

His voice had already risen into that clamorous insistent tone he assumed when he had a grievance, his bray, Katherine had called it once to tease him. The word came back to Sylvia now, with the echo of her mother’s voice and made her heart contract.

“O mamma! Was it all pretending?” she thought pitifully, and the tears rushed into her eyes again.

Franklin, who had fallen resignedly into his usual attitude of waiting, civilly patient, his head bent forward and a little on one side, saw her tears and wondered whether he could tell the reason. Did she know what all the world knew? Did she resent? A girl of

her age might easily resent her mother's interest for anything outside herself. He had always thought of her as very much of a little girl, but this afternoon she seemed older, graver, even taller. It was easy to imagine how she would look some day when she had left her childhood behind her. The old Dean sat down in his leather-covered arm-chair listening impatiently and tapping his knee with an ivory paper-cutter which he had taken from the lamp-stand beside him.

Stephen stood before him, still so absorbed in his own distractions that he did not yet see that there was any one else in the room, talking so fast and furiously that everybody perforce had to give him attention.

He was telling about his unlucky examination. Every one but the Dean had heard it before but every one listened while he told it again, till he concluded with the words:

"I believe he intended to stick me all along and is glad of it."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said the Dean. "Don't talk like that to me, my boy, about your professors. You told Mr. Brauer you thought the paper very difficult? I hope you were courteous, respectful."

Stephen declared he had been most courteous, most respectful, but all to no effect. The examinations next day were closed to him as long as that condition stood against his name. The Dean listened for a little while longer, but more and more impatiently, his bushy brows drawn together till they met over his eyes. He interrupted Stephen abruptly at last.

"There, there, my boy. That will do. There has

been a mistake here which I think I can set right. I'll see Brauer myself this evening."

"But will there be time, sir?" said Stephen anxiously. "You know the lists are going to the printers now. I have an examination with him to-morrow at nine."

"To-morrow, you say," said the Dean shrugging up his shoulders and running his eyebrows into his forehead, and puffing out his lips as he did when he was perplexed. But in a moment he resumed briskly, "Let me see, Field. Haven't you Brauer's list there with you among the others? Just give it to me a moment. I want to look at it."

Franklin ceased all at once from a reserved detached onlooker, to fall into his other state of wordless futile questioning as to his own line of conduct in unexpected emergencies. The sheaf of papers in his hand had been intrusted him by Merritt, clerk of the faculty, to take to the printers. They were only formal lists furnished by each professor, of the men in their courses eligible for final examinations. But suppose some one challenged his right to hand them over to the Dean's inspection, what could he say?"

The Dean himself, however, seemed to have no scruples as to his right in the matter, but took them from his unwilling hand without even noticing his hesitation, and began to glance through them. There was a moment's silence while Franklin was still asking himself whether he ought to have relinquished them, or on what principle he should have retained them, when Stephen, suddenly perceiving that Sylvia was in the room, crossed over hurriedly and stood be-

side her, bending down, making shamefaced excuses for his absorption, while she looked up, laughing, teasing him, though all the time vaguely surprised that she could hide her misery under something so like her usual manner. He soon put away his gloom, and began to toss his head, and smile in his little caressing way, quite confident in his pampered experience as a pet of fortune, that his cares were safe on the back of some one eminently fitted to bear them, and that everything was coming right at once. But he turned with a dismayed squeal, "What sir?" when the Dean stopped suddenly in his perusal of Mr. Brauer's list with an abrupt exclamation—

"No it is not here. His name is not here—is it Field?"

Franklin looking over the paper extended to him, was obliged to say it was not.

"Does that mean I shan't be able to go up for the examinations, sir?" cried Stephen trembling again.

"No, no. Not at all, not at all. It only means a little delay."

"Delay sir!" echoed Stephen in alarm. "Does that mean another private paper with him? Then I'm done for. It is no use. I can pass anything the class has, I'm sure, but if he gets me alone, he'll stick me again sure." He added in an aside to Sylvia, "Just wait till I get him outside of this college some day! I'll make him sorry he ever hit a man when he couldn't hit back."

Sylvia laughed, so that Stephen did not hear what the Dean said next.

"I beg your pardon sir," he said starting forward. "Did you say I could not go with my class?"

"No, no," said Dr. Lawrence, "I don't want to make too many exceptions for you. That would be favoritism, which would never do. No exemptions from class requirements," he added, with a specious air of judicial integrity, which evidently quite deceived himself, though it made Franklin smile furtively. "We must manage it some other way. Let me see," he went on meditatively. "If I had time . . ." drawing out his watch and returning it without looking at it, "if I had time I should just run over to Brauer's now and see him about it before these lists go to the printer's. But I am afraid it is too late. I suppose you want to go along at once, Field?"

"As soon as I have yours, sir," replied Franklin softly.

"Well then I think," said the Dean pulling himself round in his big chair, knocking down some books and papers piled neatly together on the stand as he reached across it to his desk, "I think, considering how little time we have, and how much there is at stake for this young man . . . this is the better way." His efforts to reach his desk being quite futile, he spoke to his granddaughter whom he noticed for the first time, "Just reach me that pencil, child."

She handed it to him and then seeing what a bad business he was making, trying to write against the soft arm of his chair, she offered her services, half-mischievously,

"Let me do it grandfather."



He gave her the paper and she took a pen and wrote in her pretty handwriting across the place where Dr. Lawrence had begun his illegible scrawl—"H. Stephen Dullas," amused to feel Stephen's eyes upon her and to know that he attached some pleasant sentimental importance to the fact that it was by her hand his name was replaced in the roll of hope. Then they all started a little to see Mrs. Lawrence come in. She paused a moment in the doorway at the sight of other people with the Dean, and Franklin who was watching her with keen interest in the new light which had been lately poured upon her, saw her glance in a sort of startled surprise from Sylvia to Stephen who had not raised their heads on her entrance but stood close together, with drooping heads, each unconscious of the other's embarrassment. In an instant she had gathered herself together again and came forward quickly to greet the Dean who had risen to his feet and stretched out his hand on seeing her crying:

"Well Kitty, my love, how do you do? Were you beginning to wonder what had become of me?"

She caught his hand in both of hers leaning against him for a moment as if for comfort in the mere personal contact of that kind arm, looking up to his dim eyes fixed affectionately upon her, grateful for the confidence that his kindly loyal old mind had no room, no interest to receive any other thing about her than what he knew and had place for already.

He began at once to ask her about his lists. Where were they? Did she know?

"Yes of course. They are here somewhere. Don't



you remember? You gave them to me to copy just before you went away. There was one name you were still uncertain about passing. Let me show you," and she began to look through the papers he had scattered about his desk in search of what he wanted, and when she had found it, to call his attention to some parts of it still in doubt.

If she had known it, at the first sound of her voice, Sylvia was quite her own again. For a little while the needle of her affection had gyrated wildly after its sudden shock, but no single blow, however violent can really break an inveterate habit of love and trust; mere sight and sound, the mere resumption of formal intercourse made it settle constant to its pole again, without tangible reason for its readjustment. She looked up eagerly, and seeing her mother's aspect so entirely as usual, defiantly as usual, if she had understood as far as that, she felt herself relieved from a childish fear that her cause for resentment might in some mysterious way have injured and disfigured the outward semblance of the one she loved best. For it was not so. Katherine was somewhat pale indeed. There was a certain intensity in her expression which made her eyes almost poignantly sweet as she talked to the Dean, but there was no difference at all in her manner to Franklin as she gave him the lists with a little laughing apology about the delay. Then she spoke to Stephen, who had all this time been standing stiff and silent almost at her side.

"Is it all right now? Are you quite reassured about that condition?"

No doubt she tried to address him in her usual friendly affectionate tone, but her voice did not ring quite true, and she turned away almost before he began to start and stammer and answer clumsily, with a kind of embarrassed flat formality so entirely different from himself that every one noticed it except the Dean. Sylvia in fact stared at him openly till she guessed a reason which made the fierce color rush up into her cheeks again.

"Has Miss Mix told him? Well what if she has! What difference does it make to him? What business is it of his? How dare he speak that way to mamma? How stupid of him!" she said between her teeth.

And Franklin too, asked with friendly amusement as the two young men walked away together:

"Why in the world did you make such an ass of yourself?"

"I don't know. I couldn't help it," answered Stephen mumblingly. "I wish you hadn't told me. It breaks me all up to think of her caring for that brute."

"My dear fellow," said Franklin smoothly, "I would not have done so, I assure you, if I had had the slightest idea of the effect it was going to produce on you. Certainly not if I had known it was going to make you so outrageously rude to a perfectly harmless woman who was trying to be civil to you."

"Was I rude?" said Stephen meekly. "I didn't mean to be rude. I felt so rattled I didn't know how I behaved. Did she look angry at me?"

"Angry? She looked as if she thought you were

a darned fool. Excuse the language my dear fellow, but I know no other word for it. Really you couldn't have behaved with a more unreasonable bearishness, if you had been in love with her yourself, and outraged at her unfaithfulness."

"Oh let up," said Stephen in a muffled voice. "You don't understand. I have always stood in a rather peculiar relation to Mrs. Lawrence . . ." he hesitated.

"Perhaps you think she ought to have confided in you," said Franklin softly.

Stephen turned his glassy eyes upon him and answered out of his own thoughts, "It isn't as though she was anybody else. It wouldn't have mattered with anybody else, but I didn't think she was that kind of a woman."

"What kind?" said Franklin with concealed amusement. "Merely human? Not good enough for a mother-in-law? Not an angel, in fact?"

"Oh there's no good poking fun at me. I am not in the humor for it. Besides you wouldn't understand. You didn't know her." After a moment he spoke again, mournfully harping upon his disillusionment with a kind of dull wonder. "To think of her caring all this time for that cur, when I thought . . ."

"When you thought she was caring for you?" Franklin concluded for him with mischievous sympathy. But Stephen only answered:

"I don't expect you to understand," and relapsed into moody silence, walking with glassy wide-open eyes as some one who looks but does not see.

## XIX

**S**YLVIA made a sudden shy movement toward her mother as they all stood in the hall together after the departure of the two young men. But Katherine did not even see her. She was looking at the Dean, who was talking buoyantly, discounting beforehand any seriousness she might find in the incident he was confessing?

“Not any coffee my dear, not any this afternoon. In fact I have already had something. I found myself a little done up after the ceremony at the grave—nothing serious. Just a momentary dizziness. But Chandler, who was with me, made me go into the house of the caretaker to rest. While I was sitting there, his wife, a very nice woman—she tells me she was once in service with my uncle, brought me a glass of milk. That, and the few moments’ quiet there, quite set me up again. Let me see—” He stood a moment with his hand on the newel post of the stairs, as if deliberating with himself, while Katherine watched him in a kind of silent intensity.

“I suppose I ought to go over and see Brauer about those examinations,” he said at last reluctantly; his spirit was evidently longing after his familiar custom, the resumption of routine, that strength-giver of old age, whose suspension may bring confusion and for-

getfulness to jaded functions, whose return, more than anything else, brings rest. "I think it will do just as well after tea," he said at last. "Better, in fact," he concluded speciously.

"Will you come into the garden then?" said Katharine with a little breath of relief. "Your chair is all ready. Sylvia, will you bring your grandfather's cushion?"

The old Dean stretched himself out in his long chair with "Well this is nice to be at home again," he said genially, clasping and unclasping his hands. "It has been the first really warm day of the season. In fact I found it quite oppressive in the train. But toward evening the air grows fresh again. Sylvia, child, I wish you would run and get me some wrap or another. I feel cold just about my knees."

Sylvia went, not quite willingly. She had no especial affection for her grandfather. She couldn't understand why other people thought him a great man. To her he seemed quite dull and often very silly. And though he was a philanthropist in great matters, she thought him a very selfish person in all small things which concerned herself or Tom or even her mother. She was vexed when she came back with the rug, to see him take it and put it over his knees without even interrupting himself long enough to say thank you to her. He had begun already to talk about his own affairs, on and on, as if he would never stop, and now, as often before she asked herself how could her mother seem interested in all the little tiresome details, the endless evidence of what seemed to Sylvia, petty



vanity in his accounts of what had happened to him. Yet Katherine listened and encouraged with an effortless patience and attention which ended in making Sylvia almost angry.

“He thinks she would rather hear that than anything else in the world, and it is her fault. She makes him. I suppose it was just the same with me. Does she never do anything she really likes?” for it was on this point that all her hurt feeling had finally concentrated itself.

But Katherine was not pretending an interest she did not feel. On the contrary, for her too the resumption of familiar custom was bringing a certain peace and comfort. She listened gladly to the Dean’s eager old voice, pouring itself out upon the little things which she had learned to recognize as the safest salve for the deepest wounds.

“I saw Judge Daly in the Statesburg station, where we had to wait half an hour to connect with the local,” the Dean was saying.

“Did you get anything to eat?” interposed Katherine but the old man waved her question aside without answering. “It was fortunate I met him for I have been much exercised about poor Mrs. Cochran. Of course the last quarter of her husband’s salary is due in July, but I wanted to propose to the trustees to double it and allow her the use of the house through the summer. Judge Daly seems to think there will be no opposition, so I can assure her of the addition at once and relieve her mind of mere financial anxiety. But I should not have liked to do that with-



out some knowledge how the trustees would consider it in the state of the college, though I should run the risk of repayment and advance it to her myself at once, if I could afford it."

"That can be easily arranged," said Katherine quickly.

"Poor woman! I must find out if she has any plans, what she means to do. Perhaps I can help her."

"Oh do you think that is necessary?" said Katherine almost in spite of herself. "She had friends, you remember, who came to her aid when you tried to interfere before—her brother. Don't you think he is the best person to look after her interests now?"

"I saw none of them at the funeral," said the Dean thoughtfully. "Do you know anything about it? Have you seen her at all, my dear?"

Katherine answered briefly, "No, I sent her your messages through Miss Mix," and Sylvia breathless in her new knowledge of hidden meanings saw her mother's face change and harden as she spoke the name.

The Dean passed on in serene unconsciousness to speak of what he considered more delicate matters, with his usual indiscretion in Sylvia's presence. But it had been one of the earliest lessons of her little childhood never to repeat under any circumstances the things she heard discussed at home. This was the more easily complied with as the subjects most discussed were of a kind she most easily forgot.

"By the way Judge Daly was asking me about Merritt, what I thought of his ability, how much influence he had with the faculty and the boys especially

the younger alumni. Of course we all know that he finds fault with a great many of the ways things are done here—perfectly permissible, it is perfectly permissible to have one's own opinions about one's own department. But the Judge insinuated that his criticism, openly expressed, of me as head of the faculty amounted to something very like personal animosity. That seems to me an overstatement. I hardly think that can be true of Merritt's attitude to me, my dear Kitty," said the Dean with a feeble laugh. The tone of wounded feeling in his voice made Katherine put her hand over her eyes for a moment.

"I don't think he would hesitate to do you harm if it happened in the way of his own advancement," she said at last with a sort of controlled resentment which made her voice lower than usual.

"Mamma, doesn't your head ache?" Sylvia broke in suddenly, moved beyond discretion at what she felt was the Dean's selfish monopoly of more than he had a right to.

But her mother shook her head and looked annoyed.

"Hush, dear! Don't interrupt," she said a little impatiently.

Just then Molly, the white-aproned maid-servant, came out from under the cherry-trees with the evening paper. The Dean took it eagerly and glanced through its pages.

"I am looking to see . . ." he said and then broke off. "Oh by the way Kitty, I saw Prentiss in New York. He told me that appointment for West Point which he offered Tom is likely to be vacant again.

The man who got it was badly prepared. There is little chance of his passing the June examinations. Prentiss asked again about Tom, but I told him the boy was contented, and doing well here, and that his mother didn't want to part with him."

Katherine smiled, the resigned ironic smile which is all that is left us, when we hear some one we love quoting us in opinions not our own to uphold a course, to which we have submitted rather than consented.

The Dean continued his survey of the evening paper.

"Here it is. Isn't it remarkable, Kitty, the speed with which these things are done nowadays? Here is my address at Cochran's funeral this afternoon, entirely reported, correctly as far as I can see by glancing through it. I suppose it was taken down not earlier than three and it is hardly six now."

He continued to scan the closely printed columns.

"Let me see. If I can only get my eyes upon it. There are one or two things here—I should like to hear how some of it reads. It was a very difficult subject to treat, requiring the greatest delicacy, in the face of his unpopularity here—deserved, I won't deny it, deserved, yet there were some things I felt I must say, even at the risk of your thinking me indiscreet. Kitty."

He turned to her with his charming smile.

"I didn't think you indiscreet," answered Katherine rather sadly.

Sylvia watched them both in a sort of wonder. How could her grandfather sit there quietly discussing

what had seemed to her so touching and spontaneous when she heard it first, as if he had weighed it, studied it, and questioned, even as he uttered it, how it would read afterward. She blushed with anger at what she thought his childish vanity as she saw him hold the paper at different lengths while his far-sighted old eyes tried to make it out without his glasses. And her mother, what must she be feeling to hear the thing which was no doubt a living pain discussed so coldly!

But Katherine answered quite simply in a perfectly steady voice: "Let me read it for you, sir."

He relinquished the paper willingly, and leaning back in his chair again, prepared to listen at his ease, but Sylvia started with such passionate surprise, that Katherine herself looked up, and seeing her little daughter's face turned upon her, all flushed and quivering with sympathetic knowledge and outraged affection, she hesitated and drew back, struck with unexpected embarrassment. Then she frowned, as if rejecting her own weakness, and began to read with forced serenity. But Sylvia's presence, her knowledge of hidden meanings, had made impossible the task which she had undertaken as not especially difficult, as perhaps not without a certain sad consolation. She drew her breath, faltered, repeated herself, began again, then, beneath the gaze of Sylvia's wistful eyes, frowning but helpless, as she felt her breath fail her, she stopped altogether. The Dean looked up in surprise at the sudden silence, and Sylvia hung down her head in alarm. But Katherine's voice was desperately gentle when she spoke again.

"Dear, I am afraid you must let Sylvia read the rest to you. I shall have to go and lie down."

He began with kindly fussiness to insist on being told what was the matter, to explain that he did not need any one to read to him, to propose things to be done. "Was it a headache? The heat of the day?" He was evidently very much put about. But Katherine answered with hurried tenderness:

"No, no—it is nothing. I am only a little tired. I can stay perfectly well, if you would rather."

But the Dean was in haste to have her gone. A nap would do her good, he declared.

"Sylvia, run along with your mother and shut her blinds for her!"

Sylvia sprang to her feet, but Katherine turned upon her almost fiercely:

"No, Sylvia, do you hear! I don't want you! I want to be—" her voice broke and she caught it back with a sort of gasp—"I must be alone."

## XX

ETHEL PORTER came home from Statesburg that afternoon, tired and a little cross after a day's merrymaking. She walked up alone from the station, through the quiet, tree-fringed streets, and did not meet a single soul. Everybody was in the house preparing for tea. Yet there was a kind of laxness and languor about the mellow afternoon sunlight which seemed a sort of evidence of spent forces—not necessarily any more than those of the day itself, but adding a certain melancholy reflectiveness to the sum of one's own weariness. As the latch went click in the little white gate which opened to the path leading up to the Greek portico of the boarding-house, Miss Mix looked out of her upstairs sanctum and nodded a cheerful welcome: "Did you have a good time?"

Ethel raised her head and saw the little, pink-colored, inquisitive face at the upper window.

"Come in as you go by," said the owner of the Greek portico. "I have got something here that I want to show you."

By this time her story was known to so many that she had lost even the appearance of discretion in her desire to outstrip competition in telling of it. But those of her patrons who looked closely at their land-



lady at the evening meal which followed soon after saw a woful change upon her cheerful countenance, and, indeed, in her whole demeanor, as if some gay balloon which had been soaring all day in the sunlight had been suddenly pricked by a pin, and lay in your hand, shorn of its importance, reduced to a little bunch of wrinkled, discolored skin. Miss Mix was unusually silent behind her tea-tray, sniffing a little now and then as if in memory of past emotion, casting deprecating, side-long glances from time to time at Ethel, who, on her part, talked more than usual, so that the whole table was pleasantly enlivened by the reflection of her day's festivity at Statesburg. When supper was over, however, after a few moments in the dining-room, where Miss Mix held her in a sort of whimpering conversation, Ethel did not delay, even for the few minutes she usually talked with the old ladies who spent the summer evenings sitting among the fluted pillars of the boarding-house piazza, nor did she permit Franklin Field's escort, eagerly offered and frankly refused, but strolled off by herself, out of the front gate and up the street toward the college.

"It is evident that a certain little person we know has been getting something she richly deserves," said one of the old ladies to another, with great satisfaction.

"There is no one better able to do it than Ethel Porter," replied the other. "Dear me! It seems as if it were only yesterday that she was a big girl with yellow braids down her back, and I saw her shaking Harriet Mix so hard in her father's own garden that I had to step over and interfere."

Meanwhile Ethel was threading her way through the hidden paths among the professors' houses, till she came by the back road to the open space behind the Dean's walled garden. She opened the little gate and looked in.

There was no one there but Tom and Sylvia. Tom was sitting on a low stool, bending forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands busily engaged in weaving and plaiting together a few long blades of grass, which ostensibly engaged his whole attention. Sylvia had flung herself down near him, across her grandfather's chair, her face hidden against her arm as if she had been crying. At the first sound of a new arrival she sprang to her feet and, without even looking round to see who it was, fled away through the cherry-trees, while Tom came forward slowly, even more shyly than was his wont, still twisting and twining his blades of grass.

"How do you do?" said Ethel kindly. "I wonder whether I could see your mother for a moment. Where is she?"

He looked more and more embarrassed.

"I don't know; I think she has a headache. I mean she is lying down upstairs." There was a moment's silence, then Tom said:

"Do you want me to tell her you are here?"

He looked up for the first time, and she was struck with the wide sweep of his brows, and the long, gray eyes, which gazed out at her with an instinctive sadness in them, which was like his mother's.

"No, no," answered Ethel. "I just wanted to

give her something." She found herself stammering, almost embarrassed. "It is something of hers, something Miss Mix found of hers, and that I bring back to her. She will understand."

So did Tom apparently. He raised his head, and his wide, melancholy eyes suddenly melted into a shy, almost affectionate smile.

"Oh, thank you," he said gratefully, and then relapsed instantly into stolidity again; but as Ethel put the little packet into his hand, she saw a clear, crimson color creep up under his pale, fine-grained skin, and show in his thin boy's cheeks.

"What a charming fellow!" she thought to herself as she went away. "Perhaps I ought not to have sent them that way. But I am sure he is perfectly to be trusted, and I don't believe Kitty wants to be bothered by seeing me this evening."

Tom went back hastily into the house, swung himself up the shallow stairs two at a time, and in another moment stood before his mother's closed door. He knocked. At first there was no answer.

"It is I—Tom," he said in the uncertain bass of his boyish voice.

"Mother, may I speak to you just a moment, at the door? It's—it's important."

There was a soft movement inside, a slipping of a bolt back from its place. In another moment his mother stood before him. He heard her voice speaking quite as usual:

"What do you want of me, Tom dear?" But he saw only the edge of her white gown on the floor

at his feet, for he kept his head down low on his breast as he extended the little package for her acceptance.

“Mother, this is yours; Miss Porter left it,” he said gruffly, and fled downstairs again, hardly knowing how she had taken it, or if she had taken it, except that he felt his hands empty again.

## XXI

THE college year was so near its close that there had come to be a note of finality in the smallest details of its routine, lending them a significance and sadness which did not properly belong to them. There were the last baseball games on the athletic field, where the smell of the crushed grass mingled with the scent of the small, sweet cigarettes usually affected by the college lads, and when the air was filled with the shouts and clamor of young boys' voices, and the higher notes from the crowds of young girls come to see their side win. There were the last senior recitations, the Dean's reception to the graduating class. The college woods were vocal with anxious aspirants for honors on the Commencement stage, practising their speeches alone among the trees. And there was a feeling of sentimental regret, growing stronger and stronger among the seniors as they saw the last moments of four college years dropping away from them. They went about wistfully among their familiar places, which would so soon learn to do without them, believing, in their simplicity, that others felt as they did, that no other class could exactly take their place on the college campus, or even in the recitation-room.

A senior song, without much poetry but with a minor note in its refrain, chiefly consisting in varia-

tions of the word "farewell," coupled with all the places and persons, and even studies, they had loved or hated during their college course, was always resuscitated during this last term, and sung to satiety by the groups assembled in the twilight on the dormitory steps :

"Farewell, fare you well, for we must leave you,  
Farewell, fare you well, jolly old Dean,"

sang the students as they passed the Dean's corner in the warm June nights. For all the sentiment and activity of the season was this year favored and enhanced by a period of beautiful weather. Day after day rose from the east like a silver bubble, rolling its way serenely over the sweet, green enclosures and gray old buildings of the college, taking a thousand peacock colors with the late afternoon, and vanishing in a sea of glory across the low, blue hills where the sun set at night; each day was a little warmer than the preceding one, but none showed any signs of a break in the weather to mar their perfect sequence.

"What luck!" said the seniors to one another. "If it only lasts through the garden party, it can do what it wants on alumni day."

It was the characteristic attitude of the undergraduate. The garden party was their own affair, a reception to the faculty and the people of the town who had entertained them. How much more important, how much more truly a college event, than the mere return of its alumni to prowl for a day among its halls and



cloisters and partake of a banquet in the college gymnasium!

The day was lovely, the upper terrace of the Botanical Garden was crowded with ladies in festive array, the strains of the little band of stringed instruments, hired for the occasion, sounded gayly from its hiding-place in the shrubbery. But the Dean was late, and Mrs. Lawrence with him, at which latter fact, especially, Littelton society felt itself aggrieved. For it had not by any means got over a thrill of excitement at Katherine's every new appearance among them since the discovery of her letters.

It was not a very great secret, but neither was Littelton a very great place, and its people had come into their possession in a way peculiarly stimulating to their interest, peculiarly romantic, as they themselves judged romance.

Mrs. Lawrence had always been something of an enigma to them. They had never quite liked her, or got over being annoyed at her unexpected deviations from obvious rules of conduct. When she ought to have wept, she remained impassive; when they wanted her to be amused, even her careful civility could not always conceal her pained surprise; and now, when, by her age and position as a mother of grown children, they had exempted her from the mere possibility of sentiment, they had suddenly discovered that she still had a heart capable of passionate feeling. But when they looked for her to be crushed, overcome by the death of the man she had been in love with; when they scanned her face for signs of grief, tears, even, they

found nothing but a kind of strained serenity which told them nothing they could understand, not even as much as they knew already. They would not have been surprised if she had hid herself to nurse her sorrow in secret. But she went everywhere just as usual. And after all, as the more reasonable were quick to point out, it would have been somewhat ridiculous for her to stay at home in mourning for another woman's husband, even after the other woman, wrapped in her ill-made widow's weeds, had removed herself from among them and returned to the unknown places which had brought her forth. And then there was the doubt which checked their sympathy for her in the tragedy of his loss and death; there was always a chance that, while they were pitying her, she was congratulating herself on her escape from an ignominious fate, made visible to her through the years of her lover's marriage to another woman. Still, they could not be sure, and there was not even an inner circle of initiated who was any surer, who could have satisfied general curiosity if they had cared to do so, for Katherine had made no exceptions in the deep reserve behind which she hid herself from friends and foes alike.

What every one knew already she could not take from them; but she held her face up steadily for their inspection, as if defying them to find there any further betrayal of what was going on under the surface, shirking no occasion of going among them, which the season and Sylvia's new requirements demanded.

But now she was late. Her absence gave food at once for new conjecture. "Maybe she is sick," said

Miss Mix, whose deep-purple silk and flowery bonnet made its own effect among the softer colors of nature.

"She was as white as death at the reception last night," said little Miss Schuyler, in pale gray trimmed with exquisite old lace. "My heart ached for her. I was afraid once that she was going to faint."

"No—here she comes," rejoined Miss Mix, almost disappointed, "dressed like a girl, as usual, though we all know she might be a widow twice over at this very minute if all had gone well."

Katherine came by with her father-in-law, who kept his heavy old hand on her arm as he stopped and spoke to the little group of ladies, even Mrs. Brauer, who half-turned aside, and answered with a sort of nasal discourtesy born equally of dislike and embarrassment. Then they passed on, and with the best intentions in the world, those Katherine left behind could not even find it to say about her that she looked especially pale.

There was yet another little group who had noticed the late arrival with imperfect friendliness. Just at the head of the steps, a little to one side, near the balustrade, there was an empty, gravelled place which commanded a view of both terraces, where there had been placed an iron table and several garden chairs. Here, by a sort of natural attraction, had gravitated certain members of the faculty who were by preference not attuned to ordinary social events, but who had turned out on the present occasion with a view of showing their good-will to the senior class, and em-

phasizing their absence from the Dean's reception the night before. Merritt was there, his chair swung back on two legs, or even one, as he hitched it here and there with his shoulders in turning to one or another of the little group which always surrounded him. There was also Brauer, silent and massive, standing steadily on both feet; tutor Wynans, with his complacent, spectacled smile, and very shiny boots turned up at the toes; and Brownell, sitting on the edge of the balustrade, swinging his legs violently, looking all about him, but still finding time to throw in a word here and there to what the others were saying. Brownell was a victim to dyspepsia, and when the fit was upon him, he would sit among his fellows for hours, wrapped in depressing, almost leaden gloom and silence. At other times he was uplifted by a sort of voluble high spirits, which emphasized the hard boyishness of his blond coloring and flaxen hair, but which betrayed the dryness of his imagination and the dulness of his ideas more hopelessly than his silences. To-day his good temper was finding its outlet in a kind of rough banter which took its point from his colleagues' known weaknesses.

"Did you find out why Chandler didn't come to the faculty meeting yesterday?" said some one of the little group.

Brownell broke out at once in his somewhat unintelligible gabbling tone: "I can tell you. I found him afterward in the library reading the new magazines. 'Why, professor, how's this? how's this?' said I. 'We have all been waiting for you over at the

office building. Why weren't you with us?' He pressed one finger delicately against his forehead a moment, and then looked up with that gentle little air of his. 'Faculty meeting, faculty meeting,' he said. 'Strange, very strange. It quite slipped my memory.' "

It was a very bad imitation of the old gentleman's quaint mannerisms, but good enough to make the others grin, and Merritt burst into a short, angry laugh.

"And that man draws a bigger salary than you do, Wynans," he said, turning his chair toward the spectacled tutor of history. "Is it any wonder that the college is going to wreck and ruin?"

"How about that protest to the trustees, Merritt?" said Brownell, breaking into noisy laughter. "Has it made a good impression? I have heard nothing of it myself, but you may have had some indirect communication with that august body." He was not surprised to see Merritt burst into a rage.

"Oh, the trustees! I have my own opinion of the trustees! Bribed to a man, bribed to the last man—that scoundrelly politician, Henry Dullas, with this honorary degree that we are ordered to bestow upon him—a degree he is no more fit for than his young jackanapes of a son is for the B.A. the college gives him this Commencement. At least I suppose we do. I see his name up on the board, though I never understood how he came out with that condition in physics, Brauer. I thought you had decided to debar him?"



That placid gentleman began to show signs of embarrassment.

"Such had been my intention. He was debarred. His presence at the finals was entirely irregular; the Dean has apologized to me for it. I had omitted his name from the lists, but the Dean reëntered it without my knowledge. So he took his examinations with his class, and did much better than I expected; passed so well, in fact, that I had no excuse for holding the former condition against him."

"But I don't understand," said Brownell, with feigned innocence. "His name reëntered on the lists, you say? You didn't need to go by the lists. It was your own recitation-room. All you had to do when you saw him there was to tell him to clear out."

"Well, ahem—" said Mr. Brauer, rubbing his short, square beard aside so as to let the air blow in upon his neck above his low collar, "in fact I was not able to hold my examinations that day. Young Perry gave out the papers."

Brownell was enchanted, and the other began to move his head rather pompously to and fro under the raillery of his noisy laughter.

"I went to the Dean about it myself as soon as I perceived it. As I say, I made him apologize. It seems he had meant to see me about it earlier. He had entered it, in fact, in his memoranda—he went so far as to show me the entry, but in some way the thing had slipped his memory." Merritt burst into one of his tirades of violent abuse.



"Oh, he got round you as usual, I suppose, with his rhetoric—the old wind-bag! Mere rhetoric, empty-sounding words, with nothing behind them. That's the whole secret of the Dean's influence on the trustees and alumni. No doubt he would succeed better if he could turn the financial statement into rhetoric, too; but, unfortunately, the financial statement, being only plain figures, can't lie, and that's the reason we all know, to the very last assistant, that the college hasn't met its expenses for the last five years, but is falling steadily more and more behind, and that the next step will be a cut in our salaries."

At the mention of salaries and financial statements, a gloom seemed to descend upon the whole assembly, even Brownell, whose highest spirits could hardly help evaporating at the mere thought of meeting the butcher's bills for his wife and babies on any smaller sum than that which bound him already.

"There is the Dean now," he said suddenly, from his seat facing the entrance. "I was wondering why he didn't put in an appearance. It's pretty late. People are beginning to go."

Merritt hitched himself round on his chair to look behind him. Then he hitched back again.

"Faugh! It makes me sick to see them all bowing and scraping around him—men who, if they said what they thought, what they have said themselves in confidence to me—" He broke off in a disgust which was evidently too deep for words.

"All the same, I think the old fellow looking very badly," said Brownell, beginning to swing his legs

again. "I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't last out the year."

This loosened their tongues again, for they all had something to say about the effect the Dean's death would have on the college, till Merritt, rearing his thin length to its full height, rose from his chair and strolled away toward the part of the grounds where his wife was presiding over the refreshments.

The cohesion of his presence being removed, the others drifted away one by one, till, when Franklin Field came by a few moments afterward, there was no one left but Wynans, standing solitary, leaning upon the balustrade, gazing out through his spectacles upon the gay scene below, his usually lethargic countenance touched by an expression of mild sentimental melancholy. For even a man well informed in all the intricacies of mediæval history must feel a certain sadness, on a beautiful June afternoon, looking out over many lovely ladies of all ages and characters, and conscious of no aptitude in his own learned soul by which he could commend himself to any one of them. He looked wistfully at Franklin, standing on the edge of the steps, his limpid blue eyes wandering here and there over the bright flower beds beneath him, evidently looking for some one.

In another moment he had spied her out. Wynans saw him descend the steps and take the shortest way to the little artificial pond in the middle of the garden, to join a lady in blue muslin, who stood beside a garden bench talking to a tall gentleman. Both seemed glad to see him. Wynans sighed again, for the lady was

Ethel Porter, and he admired her dimly in his slow soul, and was oppressed by the cold hostility with which she regarded him, when she regarded him at all, merely as another unit in the sum of the "other side," as she called that part of the faculty who were wavering in their allegiance to the Dean.

## XXII

ETHEL turned from her cavalier as Franklin approached them.

"Has the Dean come?"

"Yes; I left him with Mrs. Lawrence just now on the upper terrace."

"I want to speak to him," said Ethel, "on important business."

Franklin stood by, smiling his little secret smile, which made him seem so discreet that it was a long time before any one realized that he always finally told everything he knew. He felt pleasantly like a conspirator as he said to Miss Porter in an undertone:

"I have got last night's *Statesburg Messenger* for you—two copies."

"There, Chase, I said I would get one!" cried Ethel, turning triumphantly to her companion, who shrugged his high shoulders and smiled, not disagreeably, though he had a narrow mouth, without quite room in it for all his long, white teeth. He was a slender, dark man, with a narrow face, a prominent, crooked nose, large, dark eyes somewhat magnified by his glasses, and a lisping, affected manner; but when he talked he was more amusing than he looked.

Franklin already knew him as Mr. Chase Hether-

ington, a rising lawyer of Statesburg, and Littelton knew him as an old beau of Ethel's.

"I wish you joy of that scurrilous sheet," he said rather contemptuously.

"But I want to see that letter about the Dean."

"Not even signed. Vulgar abuse. You had better not look at it."

"Oh, you always were a lukewarm, cautious creature!" she cried audaciously. "A man who really loved the college would resent it."

"You will be sorry you abused me this way when you read my name on the subscription list Dullas has been carrying round among the Statesburg alumni for the last three weeks. It is more than I can afford, so I think it must be generous."

"O Chase, you are an angel! I take back all I said just now. Is it really true that those stingy creatures in Statesburg are going to do something for us?"

"Conditionally, only conditionally, my dear; and we, who have pledged ourselves, still cherish fears that we won't succeed in raising the whole one hundred thousand dollars in the required time. All or nothing, you know."

"Oh, one hundred thousand dollars!" cried Ethel. "They never can raise that. Why did they propose so much?"

Hetherington replied demurely: "I believe I had some such feeling myself when I subscribed in the first place. The very size of the sum had a kind of protection in it. Lately I am becoming a little nervous.

I met Dullas in the street the other day, and he declares he will have it all promised before next week."

"I believe one of the most important matters which calls the Dean to Statesburg this evening is to address your committee," remarked Franklin neatly.

The other man made a gesture of burlesque dismay.

"The last screw," he murmured. "Guaranteed to draw water from a stone."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way," said Ethel crossly, "as if you didn't care. It sounds horrid. But what makes the honorable Henry S. Dullas so active in the matter? I thought he was a man who was always on the make."

"Well, so he is. You know he hopes to go to Washington next autumn. The college is going to give him a degree; it adds to a man's importance, especially if he doesn't deserve it."

"Whether he deserves it or not, he has shown himself a more loyal son of Littel College than you, Chase," said Ethel hotly. "He has sent his son here, and you let your little brother go off to Yale."

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed apologetically.

"I couldn't help it. The boy was set on it himself. We couldn't stop him. He wanted to play football. And let me tell you, Miss Ethel, it is very well to talk loud about loyalty to one's alma mater, and all that, but a small college is not always the best place for a man, even if his father did go there before him. Take the case of Dullas, for instance. It would have been a great deal better for that young cub if his father



had let him go to one of the big universities, as he wanted. It might have knocked some of the conceit out of him."

"Oh, I am sure he is a very charming boy as it is!" cried Ethel. But Chase went on without heeding her:

"Compare him with a man of his own kind at Harvard and you will see what I mean. You agree with me, don't you, Field?"

"I am afraid I am only too ready to pronounce in favor of my own university," said Franklin with polite hesitation. But Ethel brushed away their arguments as not worth consideration.

"I confess I do like loyalty," she reiterated, "even if one has to make some sacrifices for it."

They had turned from the stagnant basin in the middle of the lower garden, and were pacing one of the narrower paths which led to the upper terrace, when, in the thickest part of the shrubbery, emerging somewhat cautiously from a shady walk beside some beech-trees, they came upon Sylvia.

"Well, you child," cried Ethel kindly, "what are you doing here alone? Up to some mischief, I'm quite sure. Come here. This is Mr. Hetherington, an old Littel graduate, and a great friend of all your aunts."

The young girl came forward simply. She had never seen Mr. Hetherington before, but she was quite ready to adopt him among her acquaintances at Miss Porter's bidding, and listened with shy amusement to the talk full of innuendo, and reference to what she could only half-understand, which had been begun by the form of Ethel's introduction.

"I knew all your aunts," said the Littel graduate, "and admired them equally—I may say, adored them all—and so did every man in my class, at one time or another. We were a very inflammable class, even from freshmen. At the end we grew to take a certain pride in it. I think it was a boast of our senior year that there was not one man among us who had not offered up his heart to some one at least once during his college course. I may say, however, in spite of a most profound admiration for your Aunt Sylvia, that it was Miss Porter who turned me down the oftenest in the four years I stayed here. She pretends she has forgotten it now."

"You absurd creature!" said Ethel, laughing. "Don't judge him too severely, Sylvia. He can be quite sensible on occasions."

Sylvia was silent, but her eyes were full of attention. Ethel went on, turning again to Chase:

"Do you remember that ridiculous Class Day? We used to have it in the chapel, Sylvia, when I was a girl, before they began to go downtown, as they do now, to the city churches. It was much more fun. More really a college affair. My brother Richard had the valedictory, and we all went with our arms full of flowers to throw to him afterward. And this wretch here, instead of tossing them decorously, as we asked him, stood and hurled them like baseballs from the sixth row. Poor Richard was nearly annihilated. If he hadn't dodged most of them, he would have been knocked down."

"I nearly floored him, though, with one bunch of

hard moss roses from the Loomis's garden. I could get a sort of grip on that. It went through the air like a catapult. Well, he got it harder when Mary refused him the morning after the ball. He wasn't the only one, however. The college woods were full of it all that day. But I believe you were the only girl who turned two men down the same morning."

Ethel laughed. "I hope you don't believe everything people tell you, Sylvia," she said, putting her hand on the young girl's arm and drawing her closer when the narrowness of the path made the two men fall behind or in front. Sylvia's eyes were full of interest.

"I didn't know any man ever told when some one refused to marry him," she said in a low tone of innocent surprise to Ethel, when for a moment they were almost alone together. "I thought even the girl ought not to tell, for fear of hurting his feelings."

"No greater mistake in the world," answered Ethel briskly. "After a certain age a man gets just as much pleasure in boasting of a refusal as of any other experience, and on just as little ground. In this case, for instance, I never refused Mr. Hetherington, for the excellent reason that I never had a chance; but for a long time it has amused him to say so, and it is not worth while to spoil his pleasure by contradicting him."

"Was that after mamma had come to live here?" asked Sylvia eagerly.

"No, my dear, those were in the dark ages, before we even knew there was such a person as your mother.

But Sylvia, child, I have known you ever since you were born," said Ethel more seriously, drawing back so as to let the two men in front get a little farther out of earshot. "I am older than your mother, so you must not be vexed with me if I scold you a little."

Sylvia looked at her seriously, with transparent, elusive eyes.

"O Miss Ethel," she said, "you are very nice to care enough about me to want to scold me."

"You little humbug!" answered Ethel. "Don't you feel guilty, doesn't your conscience reproach you for treating that poor, good-looking swain of yours as you have been doing for the last few days?"

"When?" asked Sylvia innocently.

"At the Chandler's dance on Tuesday night. In your own house, at your grandfather's reception. I have my eyes on you."

"I don't know what you mean," said Sylvia still more innocently. "Stephen is not cross with me."

"Isn't he? Well he ought to be. Do you know what it is to play with a man, Sylvia?" Sylvia smiled shyly and shook her head. "Well you may not know, but that's what you are doing. And now let me give you some good advice, which may save you trouble some day. It is never worth while to treat a man very badly if there is any chance of your marrying him afterward."

Sylvia looked interested. "You may say you are not going to marry Stephen, but if you will listen to me, you might do a much worse thing. They say a

girl is never willing to accept her first proposal, but it turns out more often than not that her first proposal is the best chance she ever gets."

"Yes," said Sylvia seriously. "That is what is meant by the fable about the crooked stick, I suppose."

Ethel paused and turned upon her one of her bright, intent looks, but seeing nothing but innocent attention in her expression, she returned to the charge.

"Now, Stephen, for instance, is good looking, he has a good position, he will have plenty of money, and he is a nice, sweet fellow."

"I know. Every one says that he has a very good heart," assented Sylvia. Ethel looked at her again in sudden suspicion, but nothing could have been more transparent than her appearance. She was evidently seriously trying to meet the older woman on her own ground, even while holding her own reserves. Ethel resumed with more heat:

"Oh, it is all very well to turn up one's nose at a good heart! Some day, when you are older, and have tried other things, you will perhaps find just how rare and precious it is to be sure of the good heart of an honest man who loves you, and then——"

"Yes," said Sylvia solemnly, "that is what people always say; then it is too late." Ethel couldn't help laughing.

"You absurd child! I suppose I am only wasting my words over you. It is only when you grow to be as old as I am that you will recognize their wisdom."

"It seems so funny to hear you talk, as you do all the time, as if you were very old," said Sylvia, so in-

genuously that Ethel was not even sure that she was consciously turning the subject. "You know you really seem as young as Marjorie and me, except for knowing more things."

"Do you know how old I am?"

"You say you are older than mamma," replied Sylvia discreetly.

"And do you know how old she is?"

"She always said she would tell me when she was twice as old as I."

"You look absurdly young for your age, but I fancy you are quite eighteen."

"Yes, last month," said Sylvia laughing.

"Do you think your mother looks much younger than I do?" Ethel continued with curiosity, half-mischievous, half-genuine.

"I don't know," said Sylvia, with a sudden change of voice. "It is very hard to think of mamma exactly like other people. There was a shadow on her face as she finished, which didn't lighten as Ethel continued:

"I suppose you are very fond of her?"

"Yes," answered Sylvia gravely; but she did not speak again till a sharp turn in the path they had been climbing brought them unexpectedly into the light and movement of the upper terrace, where Franklin and Hetherington were waiting for them.

A clamorous group of youths and maidens at once made a descent on them, calling Sylvia in various keys.

"We have been looking for you everywhere!"

"Where have you been?" cried Stephen, planting himself at her side with a sort of bounce. Ethel,



glancing sideways, saw that she submitted very docilely to be carried off, though answering their questions as to her disappearance with somewhat disingenuous vagueness.

Hetherington drew out his watch. "If you want to see the Dean before he goes—" he began.

"I do," said Ethel, "and so do you. We must go at once or he will have escaped me, and you won't get a lift down to the station, or the opportunity of admiring Mrs. Lawrence's eyes."

The Dean was delaying, the centre of a little crowd of friends and admirers, his tall, slender figure and gray head towering over most of them. He was in very good spirits, taking gallant part in the talk and banter going on about him, though his fine old face seemed every now and then to fall into disarray, overpowered by the enfeebling laughter of old age.

Near by, though remote from the life and gayety of the other group, Katherine stood, talking intermittently to an old lady or two from the boarding-house and a shy student who seemed to find comfort for his embarrassment in her gentleness. But her eye was on the Dean, watching with suppressed impatience for his first sign of departure, the increased effort in her polite attention to what was being said to her betraying her weariness and longing to be gone. But she greeted Mrs. Chandler, who appeared at last, late, hurrying, and a little distracted, with instant eagerness and cordiality.

"How late you are! I wanted to speak to you about this evening."

"Yes, I am late. I was afraid you would be gone." They drew aside from the others to discuss their children's requirements, in which conversation Ethel interrupted them.

"Kitty, I want to ask you. Have you seen that letter in the Statesburg paper?"

"Yes," said Katherine drawing her reserve about her.

"Has the Dean?"

"Yes," answered Katherine briefly.

"What does he think of it?"

Katherine looked down a moment, choosing her words—then answered with her usual expressionless gentleness:

"I think he was hurt, but not so much by its criticism as its evident unfriendliness."

"Does he know who wrote it?"

"No."

"Harriet Mix says the men think it was Merritt."

"He is not an alumnus."

"That wouldn't prevent his signing himself one."

Katherine raised her eyebrows. "Very likely."

"I want to tell the Dean."

"Oh, don't!" said Katherine, almost involuntarily.

"Why not? I think he ought to be shown up for what he is. I think the Dean ought to be put on his guard. There ought to be some way of getting rid of such a man from the faculty."

She went on, more and more impatient of Katherine's silence:

"O Kitty, you are no fun! You haven't a trace

of the fighter in you. Why, the Dean himself is not above getting a certain fun out of the give and take of a good struggle. You know he thoroughly enjoyed that fizzle of a protest to the trustees. But you are so desperately serious about it. One feels all the time with you as if one were hitting against flesh and blood."

"I am flesh and blood," said Katherine with a sort of pathetic simplicity which made Ethel's eyes suddenly fill with tears. She made an involuntary movement toward her, but Katherine had already retired into her shell again, and Hough appeared at the moment to say that the carriage was waiting.

As the Dean with his little train began to move toward the gate, Sylvia came up to her mother with a rush, followed closely by Stephen.

"O mamma, are you going?" she exclaimed, and the young man, too, cried out, almost blatant in his efforts to resume his former easy and affectionate relations with her, but he soon stopped, silent and rebuffed by the cold sweetness of his reception by her. Sylvia sent him a swift, almost contemptuous glance from between her long lashes. None knew better than she the baffling quality in her mother's gentleness, yet none the less did she despise him for being helpless before it. She turned to her mother again:

"But won't you come back? What about me?"

"You are going to the class exercises with Mrs. Chandler. I believe a lot of you are going to walk down together. You have had enough supper?"

"Yes," said Sylvia, downcast in her turn. "And you, mamma?"

"I am going to drive your grandfather to his train; and, oh, by the way, I forgot—" she turned back suddenly—"Nannie, of course you are going to the Loomis's dance to-morrow night. Would you mind taking Sylvia? I don't want to go."

"My dear child, certainly," cried Mrs. Chandler with exaggerated readiness. "And any other time, Kitty, now that so much is going on and you can't feel up to it. You don't even need to let me know beforehand. Just send her over."

Katherine visibly drew herself together, almost as if she were trying to recover some balance which had been suddenly and roughly disarranged. But after a moment she went on exactly as if she hadn't heard:

"You see, Dr. Lawrence is not coming back from Statesburg till to-morrow night, and I am afraid he will be very tired. I don't want him to arrive and find no one there to take care of him."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Chandler a little flatly. Then reviving again and resuming her kindly offices: "But any other time—" only to be put aside gently rather than gratefully.

"Thank you. You are very good, but you know I like to take Sylvia when I am able." She went away with the Dean and Chase Hetherington to where the carriage stood waiting.

Mrs. Chandler turned to Ethel, shoulders and eyebrows raised in silent comment:

"Isn't Kitty amazing? Sometimes I don't know

whether to think it's pure pluck or want of feeling. I do suppose after all that has happened, his death came as a sort of relief. No doubt she had got over most of it before we knew anything about it. By this time she may really have ceased to care."

"Not care!" echoed Ethel. "In my opinion she cares more than for anything that has ever happened to her. Just watch her a moment and you will see. She is only just able to keep a firm enough front to hold us out of speaking distance. How she must be hating us! She would be perfectly happy never to see any of us again."

"O Ethel!" said Mrs. Chandler, relinquishing the conversation unwillingly, to answer the soft, insistent pulling at her arm by which her daughter was trying to attract her attention.

"Yes, yes; we are all going to walk down together."

"Is Miss Porter going too?"

"I don't know. Are you, Ethel?"

"To the class exercises? No, why should I?"

"Oh, do come, Miss Ethel!" cried Sylvia. "It is so much nicer when you are there. Yes, indeed. You needn't laugh; I really mean it. You have a way, wherever you are, anywhere, of turning all the little chattering things that have been going on before into a—well, a kind of social event."

"You absurd child!" cried Ethel, laughing but highly gratified. Franklin smiled his little fine appreciative smile, but Stephen exclaimed with a clamor of reproach and objection:

“Well, I like that! I am glad I haven’t any speech to make at the exercises, or else it would be one on me. Little chattering things!” and he broke into loud laughter.

“I didn’t mean that,” said Sylvia, with displeased, downcast eyes. His laughter lapsed suddenly into a rather perfunctory “Ha! ha!” and he stood silent, staring vacantly into space and pulling fiercely at his little brown mustache, till she spoke to him again in a lower tone:

“You never understand!”

“Don’t I understand? I didn’t mean it, I didn’t mean it, dear,” he replied, also in an undertone, turning so as to conceal her a little from the rest of the group. “I wouldn’t vex you for anything. Can’t you believe that?”

“You may not mean to vex me, but you do,” said Sylvia with pitiless clearness.

“How do I vex you, dear?” said Stephen meekly. “Only tell me, and I’ll never do it again.” He bent over her, evidently with difficulty restraining himself from some, even the smallest personal contact, from catching her fingers, or touching even an end of her ribbon.

She drew back as he became more imminent.

“Well, don’t—well, try not to look so big. “It scares me.”

He fell back, relieved by the first signs of softening, and then furious to see Bradley beckoning from a distance.

“I hate to go! If I wasn’t grand marshal I would



cut the whole thing and stay and go with you. Would you let me? Would you let me come and sit with you if I could?"

"Why can't you, if you really wish? You know you wouldn't give up the chance of carrying that stick with the white ribbons for anything."

As soon as he saw that his anguish amused her, he increased its expression a thousand-fold for her delectation. They parted at last on very good terms.

### XXIII

MARJORIE having at last obtained her mother's attention was able to explain that her dress needed some serious alteration, which would require a return to the house before they could start for the class speaking.

"You tiresome child!" said Mrs. Chandler somewhat unreasonably. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

They were all turning back, even Ethel, but Sylvia hesitated.

"Mr. Field wants me to stay with him, Mrs. Chandler. We'll wait for you on the steps of the laboratory."

Marjorie fixed her solemn, ruminating gaze on the blue eyed tutor. She had been surprised more than once lately by evidence of growing interest in the young man's attitude to Sylvia, and felt that she must sometime warn him about it. Sylvia was not at all the girl he would really like as he grew to know her better. Marjorie, who understood them both, was quite sure that he was only wasting his time by having anything to do with her. It was too late now to interfere, but she went away regretfully with her mother and Miss Ethel, through the damp, concealed paths in the shrubbery, which conducted at last to a back entrance of the old Constable house, quite at the other end of the

college grounds beyond the laboratory and the school of engineering. The others went together out of the ornamental front gate, into the green glory of the campus drenched in the level light of the western sun.

The distance of the Alban Hills looked wonderfully blue and transparent as it shone through the leafy arches of the line of elms stretching across the sunset, sending the long, slender shadows of their trunks farther and farther along the grass. The shade had already climbed the gray front of the laboratory, though its stone steps still retained a grateful warmth from the hot June sun, when Sylvia and Franklin took their places there to wait till the little group of their friends appeared round the corner.

For a while they both sat silent, Sylvia with her chin on her hand, her level eyes gazing out, rather past the sunlit hills than at them, he stretched on the stone at her feet, thinking that he had never seen her look so lovely, so full of suggestion and delicate, tender charm.

"What are you thinking of?" he said very softly, in his gentle, somewhat plaintive voice. Sylvia answered without taking her eyes from the sunset.

"Those mountains," she said gravely. "See, they go all around and shut in the whole horizon. They are so very low, and yet there is no outlet anywhere. I was thinking that it was like a prison."

"What a way you have of putting things into words!" cried Franklin sharply. "It is quite true. They are the walls of a prison."

Sylvia turned and looked at him with a pathetic recognition which was self betrayal.

"Do you feel that too? Is it because you are unhappy?"

He shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows without speaking.

"Why are you unhappy?" continued Sylvia, with a kind of wistful interest in another person's experience of this new thing which had come into her world, for which she was so unprepared, of which she knew so little.

He was touched, and answered almost as simply as he had been addressed.

"I can't call it by so dignified a name as unhappiness. Discontented rather, disappointed at finding myself in a place for which I am not fit, among people who are uncongenial."

"You want to get out again into the world?" said Sylvia—"your world?"

"Yes," answered Franklin half involuntarily. "But I can't. As you say, the hills are very low, but they have no outlet." No sooner had he spoken than he was startled at his own frankness, and tried to disguise it, raising himself a little from his recumbent position on the lower step, in his anxiety to be, or rather not to be, apprehended.

"Don't misunderstand me. I don't want to seem to be saying a word against the people here. It would be too ungrateful after their endless kindness and interest in my affairs."

"Oh, yes," said Sylvia indifferently, "they are very kind."

"It is rather the smallness of the place than the

people who make it up, that is to blame," continued Franklin earnestly. "It takes, I suppose, practice to live comfortably in a small town where the people have really very little except one another to interest them."

"You will soon be going away again," said Sylvia. "You don't belong here."

"I don't know about that," replied Franklin a little bitterly. "Positions with salaries as small even as mine, are not going begging in the world just now. But why do you want to go away?" he went on, with his usual trained and timid instinct of turning the conversation back to the speaker whenever he found it too interestingly involved in himself. "This is your home. You have your friends; all your old associations."

"Yes," said Sylvia. She hesitated a moment in her effort to express herself. "Perhaps it is for that very reason. The people all stand round me like the hills, and tease me if I want to be anything I haven't been before."

"And do you want to be something you haven't been before?" asked Franklin softly.

"I don't know," replied Sylvia a little drearily, "but it is tiresome, because I laughed yesterday to have to go on laughing to-day. I should like to go away and never come back, except, perhaps, after years, as Miss Porter is doing, to smile and wonder and pretend I am sorry, but in my heart always to be rejoicing that I had been able to make my escape."

"The time may be coming sooner than you think," said Franklin seriously. "Don't make vows for it that some day you may remember and regret."

"No," said Sylvia. "There is no chance. I shouldn't want to go without mamma, and she would not go away from my grandfather and Tom."

He was hesitating how to reply when the others appeared as suddenly as if they had not been expected, calling to Sylvia and Franklin with the impatience of those who have been keeping others waiting and don't want to be late themselves. They went, all together across the college campus.

"There is Kitty only just come back. The train must have been late," exclaimed Ethel, as Mrs. Lawrence's carriage stopped at the Dean's step to let out its single occupant, and then was driven away again.

Franklin saw Sylvia look and look again, more and more wistfully, as they approached the corner.

"I think I'd rather go home," she said suddenly.

"Why, Sylvia!" said Marjorie, and "Why, dear?" asked Mrs. Chandler. "Do you think your mother wants you?"

"Oh, no," said Sylvia quickly, almost shrinkingly. "It is not that. It's no reason. I just don't want to go. I'm tired."

"But poor Mr. Dullas," murmured Marjorie with intense reproach.

"Don't be a little goose!" cried Ethel bluffly. "I believe you are like those naughty babies at children's parties, who only need a sight of their mother to make them begin to cry to go to her."

But Sylvia would not be laughed out of her intention.

She found Katherine in the parlor, evidently just



as she had sunk down on first coming in, her hands in her lap, every line of her attitude showing an extreme, almost hopeless weariness.

But she drew herself together quickly the instant she heard her daughter's step.

"Why should she do that? Why should she have to do that for me?" thought Sylvia with inexpressible bitterness, and she stopped abruptly in the doorway, almost ready to go away again. But Katherine had already regained her usual manner.

"Where did you come from? I thought you had gone down to the class exercises with the Chandlers."

"The rest have gone, I came across the campus with them; but just at the last I thought I'd rather not. I wanted to come back and be with you," she concluded somewhat timidly. Katherine had risen to her feet and gone to the long glass, where she began to take off her hat, looking seriously at her image in the glass a moment afterward, with the unconscious interest a beautiful woman often takes in her own appearance.

She turned at last to Sylvia, who had dropped upon the window-seat, and answered her a little coldly:

"I'm sorry, dear, for I have a great deal of copying to do for your grandfather, which will keep me busy in my room all the evening. I am afraid you will be dull."

"I don't care," said Sylvia. "I'd rather be here. I didn't want to go." Then after a moment she broke out:

"Mamma, why did you give yourself all that

trouble about finding some one to take me to the Loomis's? Indeed, I don't care about it. I don't want to go at all if you don't."

Katherine looked at her in some surprise. "My dear, why not? Are you afraid of not having a good time? You have always had a good time so far, and this is in a private house, so you are quite sure to be looked after."

"It isn't that," said Sylvia faintly.

"Is it that you don't want to go without me?" said her mother with cold gentleness. "It shan't happen again if I can help it, but you understand that I can't leave your grandfather."

"No, no!" cried Sylvia earnestly. "It isn't that. I'd much rather you didn't go. I'd rather stay at home from everything than have you go just to take me."

"But why else should I go, Sylvia, except to take you?" said her mother, more and more coldly. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know what I mean. I don't mean anything," said Sylvia indistinctly, with difficulty swallowing her tears.

Katherine looked at her a moment in silence, and then began to move about the room, at first only to collect her belongings preparatory to going upstairs, then lingering to alter the position of a chair, changing the order of the books, removing some bits of rubbish that Molly had carefully inserted among the ornaments during her morning dusting, paying no further attention to Sylvia, until the silent, forlorn young figure in the window seemed at last to arouse some compassion.

"Come upstairs," she said, holding out her hand as she stood in the doorway, and speaking very kindly. "Let us look at your dress for the Commencement ball. Poor old Mrs. Wood has been working so hard all day. It is quite finished and lying on the table in the sewing-room."

Sylvia came without a word.

The sewing-room was the old nursery, a wide, low, pleasant room, looking on the back. The daylight was fading fast, leaving only a pale gray vision of empty spaces, indistinct pieces of furniture, the wire figure for holding dresses, the sewing machine, hidden by its square cover, and Sylvia's first little empty bed, far away in a distant corner. Outside, the crickets were chirping so loud that the whole room was full of their thin, endless rhythmic cadence. It was the same sound which always had the power to throw the child into agonies of melancholy long ago, as she lay in that very little bed in the corner, whither she had been sent before it was really dark, and where she had to stay wide awake for what seemed to her hours and hours, with nothing to do but listen to the crickets singing.

If ever in the past anything had made her unhappy, if she had been naughty and her mother was angry with her, then the crickets were sure to sing the loudest. The same damp, dank smell of the wet grass in the drying yard came through the windows then as now. And now as she stood there, silent and passive in the doorway, watching her mother pull up the shade to let in all the light that was left, upon the big cutting out table, she felt herself again overcome by the same

passionate melancholy of long ago, the weakness, the helplessness, the folly of a little child that feels no safety except in the arms of some one who loves it.

"How dark it is!" cried Mrs. Lawrence. "I am afraid we shall have to light the lamp. But it is lighter here near the window. Look Sylvia! Don't you think that is pretty?" with genuine interest, as she raised the sheet from the softly tinted, fragile organdy, spread out in all its bravery on the table. Sylvia looked and tried to seem appreciative, but the crickets sounded louder than her mother's voice.

"She is only doing it to please me. She doesn't care herself. She can't really care. I wish she wouldn't try to do things to please me. It would be much easier."

But Katherine went on almost eagerly:

"See, the ribbons go this way, and this ruffle is fastened here with the little pin your Aunt Ruth sent you on your last birthday. I think it is going to be very nice. Don't you want to try it on? We can go afterward into my room, where there is a light and a long glass, and see the effect."

"Oh, no, please!" exclaimed Sylvia with a cry of such childish, characteristic alarm at what was to her always a most painful proceeding that Katherine was surprised into natural laughter. But Sylvia had quickly relapsed into her new learned meekness.

"I will if you like—if you'd rather, mamma—if you don't think it would be time enough in the morning."

Katherine stopped laughing and began to cover up

the dress again. "Of course it will do in the morning," she said a little coldly.

But Sylvia was in an agony again. "Why couldn't I have done that to please her," she asked herself. "I would have, if I had thought she cared; but how can she care for those little things!"

She followed Katherine hesitatingly out of the nursery into the sitting-room which opened out of her mother's bedroom and looked through a square, vine framed window over the college yards, lingering in the doorway, while Katherine rang for a lamp and began to arrange the papers on her desk. Sylvia was very familiar with the sitting-room. Here she had sat in her special chair and learned her lessons while her mother wrote, or had lain at full length on the hard wood floor in the draught between the door and window on hot August afternoons while Katherine read aloud to both children.

Her own picture and Tom's at all ages had their various places in the room and on the walls. On the desk, in an ivory frame, there was a softly tinted photograph of a charming boy, almost a child, in a short jacket and a turned-down collar, who looked out, frankly smiling at every one, with eyes like Sylvia's. She had always known it was her father, but to-day she saw another photograph of him, with which she was not familiar, standing propped up without a frame.

"Is that papa? I have never seen it before," she said with sudden interest. Katherine took it up and regarded it a moment.

"Yes," she said, "I was looking at it this morning, and must have left it out by accident. I never cared for it very much. That is probably the reason you have never seen it before."

"How young it is!" said Sylvia, wondering. The very unaccustomedness of the photograph made the face that looked out of it seem hardly older than Franklin Field.

"Was that taken when he was a very young man?" asked Sylvia wistfully.

"He was always a young man, my dear," said Katherine a little sadly. "This was the last picture he ever had taken."

His daughter was glad to see the photograph put away in a drawer, out of sight, for the young, untried face in it seemed to strike cruelly at the ideal of her father which had kept pace in her mind unconsciously with her growth. Then she turned to go away downstairs by herself, leaving her mother to her writing.

"Why don't you sit here?" said Katherine very kindly. "I can turn the lamp so that it shines on your book, and it is nice and cool with the air from the window."

"No," said Sylvia, "I'm afraid I'd only be in your way. It doesn't matter. I don't mind being alone."

Her mother looked at her for a moment with a kind of impatient tenderness. "Poor little child. What is there to make you so very much cast down? You make me feel as if I were cruel to you. Am I hounding you to festivities to-morrow against your will? I shan't mind if you don't go to the Loomis's."



But Sylvia shook her head. "No; I want to go now. You don't understand what I meant; but it doesn't matter."

She went away to her grandfather's empty study, not even seeing her mother's tentative movement to call her back. As soon as she was alone, Katherine let her head drop a moment, hiding her face in her two hands and leaning her elbows on the table. Almost instantly, however, she uncovered her eyes, and with a deep, short sigh took up her pen and began to write. She was still writing when Sylvia passed her open door on her way to bed.

## XXIV

**S**YLVIA had never admired her grandfather, the less, perhaps, because she had always heard him spoken of as a distinguished man. All through her little girlhood he had stood as the reason for curtailment of her pleasures, interference with her mother's society. When he talked, and he talked a good deal, she had been taught to be silent. And his attitude to her, though more than kindly, had never been one to excite peculiar affection. It had been too impersonal, too didactic, and, as she grew older, she became more and more alert to a certain quality in it which merged her into his general philanthropic interest and affection for the whole human race, or, at most, with his sentimental idea of his family as a unit. This her assertive individualism resented and rejected. She did not love him, turning on him her cool, childish, reasonable eyes with an inexorable scrutiny, which found in him only too many faults and weaknesses. Just now he seemed to her especially tiresome, almost childish in refusing to take care of himself as the doctor told him, though it was the obvious and simple way of getting better. She was almost vexed with her mother for her infinite tenderness and patience with him in his greatest unreasonableness, watching over him, and, when she

couldn't persuade him to his good, actually helping him and making it easy for him to be imprudent.

"But, after all," Sylvia asked herself with pitiless judgment, "what is the use of growing old if it doesn't teach you to give up things you want when you know they are going to do you harm. And can one be really a great man if one hasn't learned to be philosophical about little things?"

In her own heart she felt that even the loss of the alumni banquet was not a matter to make much fuss about. No doubt it would be a disappointment. But didn't people ever get used to disappointments? she asked herself; and wasn't it very selfish to go on insisting he would be well enough, as her grandfather did, evidently determined to go at all risks, quite regardless of the fact that he was making every one around him anxious and unhappy?

She came with Tom into the study on the morning of alumni day, flushed with exercise after two sets of singles on the college tennis-courts, deserted, as nearly all the undergraduates had left after the last examinations. The study seemed cool and dark, and a little sad in contrast to their youthful exuberance.

The Dean sat deep in his old arm-chair, drinking a cup of coffee from a little tray on a table by his side. He looked pallid and frail and shrunken, though he greeted his two grandchildren with his usual gallant spirits. Katherine stood beside him, grave and watchful, smiling slightly, speaking very little whenever a word from her could keep him from exciting himself.

"O Tom!" she exclaimed, when she saw her son,

"I was hoping you would come back in time. Run upstairs and dress. I shall want you to go over with your grandfather to the dinner. He will drive, and Professor Chandler is coming to take him; but I like to think of your strong arm to help him out of the carriage."

Tom vanished at once, but Sylvia lingered. He was going then, in spite of everything, though he must know it would do him harm. She watched him a moment with her brilliant, critical eyes, noticing every sign of the fumbling uncertainty which made the cup shake in his weak old hands.

Then she walked away toward the window, too annoyed with him to trust herself to look at him any longer. She did not even turn round when she heard Professor Chandler's hurried, soothing voice from the doorway: "How are you, my dear old friend? I have brought Dick Porter with me." But she heard her mother exclaim, with a little cry of glad, frank relief: "Richard! How lucky! You will take care of him and see he doesn't get too tired."

Then in the midst of a kind of rumble of welcome from the Dean, her indignation took wings in her curiosity to find out what Miss Porter's brother looked like. She saw a rather undersized man of no particular age, dressed in indistinct, light-gray clothes, which did not give enough contrast to indistinct coloring, light gray eyes and light lashes and eyebrows. But he had an agreeable smile, and a very pleasant, well modulated voice, and there was something about his manner which made Sylvia decide at once that he was nice, in which

opinion others of her sex had already agreed with her. Her mother was speaking to him with confident, almost affectionate familiarity.

"I thought I should see you after the trustee meeting last night, but when I came into the study you were gone. I expected you to wait and speak to me."

"So I should in the ordinary course of events, but Dullas carried me off and I was afraid *he* was tired," with a little gesture of his head toward the Dean, while he still held the hand Katherine had extended to him.

"He was tired. He is not fit to go now," she answered in a lower tone."

"You can trust him with me," replied Richard comfortably. "I'll take as good care of him as Tom would."

Sylvia thought he meant her brother, and was quite ready to agree with him.

"And is this Sylvia?" continued Richard Porter, looking with his pleasant smile at the young girl who stood, glimmering, erect and slender in her white tennis clothes among the shadows of the dark old room.

"Yes, this is Sylvia," said Katherine, and watched her daughter come forward and smile and raise her starry eyes to her mother's old friend, and then interrupted what the young girl was beginning to say, with a sort of eagerness unusual to her.

"She doesn't look like me!" she said. The question in her eyes gave them a kind of strained sweetness, as she awaited his reply.

Richard looked seriously a moment; then he turned to her and shook his head with a little half smile.

"Not one bit," he answered.

"It is Tom who looks like mamma," cried Sylvia, with her usual rush of feeling. "It is too bad, for he doesn't need it nearly as much as I do."

She surprised a kind of intimate amusement on the faces of the other two, which puzzled her for a moment. But then the Dean interrupted:

"Well, young people, I don't know about you, but I am quite ready to be off."

His indomitable spirit was already beginning to tear and drag at his heavy old body, raising it slowly, painfully from the deep chair, with desperate clutching at the arms, and an uncertain, lurching totter forward which carried him rapidly several steps before Richard could catch up with him. "Come along, come along," he said briskly, moving more steadily as he felt the support of the younger man's arm. "Kitty, say all manner of pretty things to Mrs. Dullas and her party at lunch. Express my regret at not being their host in my own house. I leave you my vicar. It is only I who suffer by my absence. And you will all be over later for the speeches."

When Tom came down, shining and breathless after a bath and a rapid toilet, his grandfather had been gone some moments.

"But never mind, dear. You look very nice. I shall be proud to see you in your grandfather's place at table," said his mother consolingly. "And it is really not much too early."

Sylvia was suddenly seized with alarm.

"O mamma, you are all dressed too! Is it late?"



Shall I have to finish without you? I can never tie my sash alone!"

She flew headlong upstairs, but in spite of all her haste she only had her mother's services in the arrangement of her hair. When she came into Katherine's room a few minutes later with streaming ribbons, there was no one to help her, and the sound of resonant feminine voices and laughter coming through the open door from the hall told that Mrs. Dullas and her company had already arrived, were even then upon the stairs on their way to the guest chambers to refresh their toilets after half an hour's journey in the dusty train.

Sylvia did not remember ever having seen Stephen's mother before, and when she came into the parlor a little while afterward, more disturbed at the thought of her mother's criticism than the strangers', she was somewhat overwhelmed by the large, florid, dressy lady who greeted her so kindly, in a loud, friendly voice, making room for her on the window seat beside her, and talking with embarrassing frankness of Stephen and his desire that they should both be friends.

There were several other ladies in the room, all giving an impression of color and movement and very good spirits, for they talked rapidly and laughed a good deal, and seemed overwhelmingly pleased with all they saw.

Sylvia grew excited, as she always did when surrounded by people who seemed to be having a good time. She put her critical faculties to sleep, and told

herself that this was indeed an occasion to be enjoyed, especially after she had taken her place at the lunch table and heard the voices lift themselves around her again, after one breathless moment of silence when everybody had rustled into their seats. There had been many such occasions before, when she and Tom had listened to the same roar of voices from the dining room, though they had only partaken of the festival by tasting the good things to eat after they had been enjoyed by the honored guests. But now she looked across at Tom himself, sitting in his grandfather's chair at the head of the table, very shy and a little melancholy in his efforts to be polite to Mrs. Dullas, but looking so grown up and nice in his high white collar and black coat that Sylvia quite admired him.

Katherine had what her daughter called her clear look, no doubt in contrast to the faces round her, which were rather overblown and flushed with the heat of the day. Her voice was somewhat lower than the rest, but she still could make herself heard; she talked very little, but then every one else was talking so much that more seemed hardly necessary, and the little she did say, rather added to than took away from the general hilarity.

They had not nearly finished when they were invaded by Mrs. Chandler, Marjorie, and Miss Porter, on their way to hear the speeches after the alumni dinner.

Ethel exclaimed when she saw them still at their salad :

“ You will be late ! You will miss the best ! Come

along and leave this. Kitty won't mind. She wants to go too."

"I think the best is here," said Mrs. Dullas, who was evidently enjoying her lunch and did not mean to be disturbed in it.

But Katherine exchanged glances of some intensity with Ethel, who came and stood a moment beside her.

"It will be a shame if they keep you here," she murmured, so that no one could hear but Sylvia, who sat nearest. "Hurry them along. I want you especially to be there at the speech from the trustees."

"Yes," answered Katherine. "But if I am not, I know what you mean—about you and Richard and your father's legacy."

"Richard more than me," corrected Ethel, with unusual humility. "We never could have done it at all except for him."

Katherine shook her head.

"No, you more than Richard. You never could forget how much you cared."

Ethel's face was suddenly shaken with unusual emotion.

"Yes, I always cared. It never ceased to be a grief to me."

"I am very glad," said Katherine, looking at her with grave, affectionate eyes.

She quickly recovered herself, turning again to Mrs. Dullas.

"You are a disloyal wife, sitting here enjoying yourself instead of rushing with the rest of us to hear your husband speak."

"Oh, I hear Henry every day at home," said that lady calmly, making them all laugh.

"Well, we can't waste any more time over you. Come, Nannie, let's leave them to their lunches, if that's what they like best."

"Oh, may I go too?" cried Sylvia.

Tom, too, caught his mother's eye with silent petition, and a sandy-haired, pleasant-looking girl with a long nose also showed a desire to see what was to be seen and hear what was to be heard.

The others settled back into their seats and went on eating their salad with leisurely enjoyment.

## XXV

MARJORIE'S observant eyes had seen the little intimate interview between Mrs. Lawrence and Miss Porter. Now, as she walked along, clinging to Sylvia's arm and holding her back behind the others, she remarked upon it in her own way.

"Do you suppose your mother is very fond of Miss Ethel?"

"I don't know, I am sure," answered Sylvia. "I never thought about it."

"Isn't it queer," continued the other, "to think that she might have been your aunt?"

"My aunt! How?"

"Why, didn't you know? She was engaged once, long ago, to your Uncle John."

"But Uncle John is married to Aunt Amy," said Sylvia.

"Oh, yes, but that was much later. They were engaged and going to be married when Judge Porter died. Every one had thought he was very rich, you know, but it turned out that he had lost all his money, so she was poor, and she wouldn't marry your Uncle John, who was poor, too, and she wouldn't promise to wait for him, so he was angry and went away to Chicago, and she had to go and live with a horrid, cross aunt. But the aunt is dead now, and has left her

some of her money, so she is quite rich again. I wonder whether the reason she never married is because she never could meet any one she cared for as much as your uncle. Didn't you know about it, Sylvia? Every one knows. How funny your mother never told you!"

"Mamma never tells me anything," said Sylvia under her breath, with bitterness which had for some time been growing in her at each new evidence of her own ignorance of the real interests of her mother's life.

The alumni dinner was always held in the college gymnasium, an ugly, oblong building in a grove of locusts behind the library, near the running-track and the tennis-courts. The dinner was spread on separate tables, for the trustees, faculty, and the different classes, in the main room of the gymnasium, at one end of which there was a gallery for spectators of drills or exercises.

It was here that Sylvia found herself, having to make polite speeches to Mrs. Judge Daly and the other ladies already assembled there, when she wanted to look down and find out the reason for all the noise and clapping which was going on beneath her.

"Come, Sylvia," said Tom, as soon as she was at liberty, "here's a seat. Look over here and you can see finely."

He perched beside her on the precarious wooden railing, and they were soon equally absorbed in picking out the faces of their acquaintances in the crowd below.

"Oh, there are the Seniors!" cried Sylvia in much excitement. "How solemn they look! See, they are



beginning to smoke their little cigarettes! I suppose it wouldn't be proper for them to take big cigars like the rest. But where is Stephen?"

"He's gone over to sit with his own class," answered Tom. "There he is, by Jack Marston. Do you see Jack?"

Sylvia leaned far forward in her eagerness.

"Yes, I do. How pleased he must feel! But he looks solemn too. No, there he is laughing; I can hear it up here. And see, he is looking up. He sees us!" She nodded and smiled with exquisite enjoyment, and Stephen continued to gaze up at her even after the gayety had left his face and given place to a sort of earnestness and intensity which changed him from himself.

"He does look very solemn," said Sylvia again. "I must ask him why when I see him. And who's that round-headed man with popping eyes and a very short neck, sitting by grandfather?"

"Oh," said Tom, scandalized at this rather unflattering résumé of a great personage, "that is Henry Dullas. He's a corker. Just wait till you hear him speak. He's better than all the rest put together. I've heard him before. He is one of us, you know, an Adelphic. You ought to have been at the house last night. He kept all the fraternity in a roar."

"He doesn't look like Stephen at all," said Sylvia, regarding him with some distaste in spite of Tom's commendation.

Just then the great man rose, as master of ceremonies, to propose the customary toast to the trustees.

It was a somewhat delicate position, since he was one of the body to be toasted, but he extricated himself from his difficulties with the kind of humor which goes most easily to the American heart.

It was a pity that Judge Daly, who rose to reply, was almost inaudible to most of the assemblage, though he did his best with his thin, precise little voice in the echoing, high-roofed, noisy room. And after all, every one knew already exactly what he was saying. The one hundred thousand dollars pledged by the alumni, and other behests—here Judge Daly's voice did for a moment become audible—notably the legacy left the college by his lamented friend and colleague on the Supreme Bench, Judge Porter, of the Supreme Court of the State, now paid by his heirs.

Sylvia saw Mrs. Chandler turn toward Ethel with sudden, disappointed surprise: "Is that all?" And Ethel's reply: "That is all," though she held her spirited head a little higher.

And the young girl felt vaguely thrilled and excited, as if in the presence of a great thing, though it was treated like a little one. And the tones of Ethel's voice as she gave her answer went echoing on for some time in her mind, as if they had struck a chord which responded to them.

There was a mad burst of applause from all the tables, echoed valiantly by the ladies' gallery.

Only one man sat grimly silent. The table for the faculty was nearly deserted. All the alumni had drifted away after the dinner to sit with those of their own classes who had returned. Only Merritt and Frank-

lin Field were left together, almost side by side. The older man sat with drooping head, leaning over the table, playing with his knife, a long lock of his straight, reddish hair falling over his forehead. He was so frankly depressed that young Field found it in his heart to pity him, even to express a certain kindness in a few empty words, but the other rejected them roughly.

"Oh, don't mind me. I'm all right. I'm learning." He relapsed into gloomy silence, while Franklin turned his attention to the little train of Statesburg ladies, who, with Mrs. Lawrence, appeared at last out of the crowd of waiters and hangers on at the entrance.

He would have liked to go to meet them as Richard Porter did, for he knew several of them, and wished to commend himself to them, but a strange weakness of sympathy and pity kept him near the despondent Merritt. He contented himself with watching their progress, Mrs. Dullas and the other ladies with an undisturbed front of calm self consciousness, Katherine with the poise and presence taught by necessity, which, however, never quite concealed her innate shyness and shrinking from the eyes and noise through which she must pass to reach the spectators' gallery. There she could be seen a moment after, standing looking down, her hand on the railing in front of her.

"She is a nice woman," said Merritt unexpectedly. "My wife likes her."

"It is a pity they should be so late," Franklin replied, concealing his amused surprise. "They have lost everything really worth having."

The classes were being toasted now, beginning with

the graduating Seniors. Merritt began again in the midst of the perfunctory applause for the careful schoolboy eloquence of the valedictorian, ending in a stilted tribute to the Dean.

"Those boys, now. There's no denying it. They go out from here with a rotten bad education."

"What, even in your department?" said Franklin softly. But he never got much fun from innuendo with Merritt. The man was too frank, too absorbed by the truth in its one aspect.

"Well, perhaps not there so much," he answered simply. "Though even that. One man alone can't do much against a whole system—favoritism, slip-shod management, and the boys sent through over your head quite regardless of fitness." He shrugged his shoulders.

Franklin made no reply, and the silence was unbroken between them, while the speeches went on, one class after the other, till a man arose from the late '60's.

He came from the South, and had the gift of flowery eloquence. There was something innately pleasing in his graceful sentiment, which touched even Franklin, a little bored by all this incense to gods he did not recognize. He spoke prettily of the undergraduate who thought he was the college, and openly showed his contempt of the old fellows who came back to the reunions, and then when he in his turn joined the army of back numbers, how his point of view changed, how he got to feel, and rightly, too, that the true spirit, the true life, the real ideals of a college were preserved by its alumni.

Here he was interrupted by loud cheers, and when

he was heard again he was speaking of the faculty—how from enemies, persecutors, obstructers of innocent pleasures, they became the friends, the few stable figures in a world of change, whose word of welcome and recognition was received with joy by men who had once themselves thought they owned the college, but whom the new generation did not even know by name.

From the faculty as a whole he dropped suddenly to individuals, and at last, in a breathless moment, every one found that he was paying his tribute to Wilfred Cochran. "He doesn't know," they whispered to each other, and listened in spite of themselves; for as the man talked, who had been in Wilfred's class, who knew only of his early promise and first fulfilment, the dark clouds which had obscured his end seemed suddenly rolled away, and to the few who had loved him, and all who had given him a grudging, unwilling admiration for his unquestionable gifts, the man himself came back for a moment, almost as if he had appeared in the doorway and taken his place among them—his tall, lithe figure, which never ceased to show the soldier through the civilian, his cloudy good looks lightened by his sudden, almost boyish smile.

"But he is dead," concluded his fellow-classmate, "and the college is just so much poorer by the loss of that keen mind, that generous heart, and loyal devotion to those he loved."

There was applause, faint at first, but growing louder, and always enough to cover the murmur of half contemptuous, half embarrassed laughter which sprang up also. But a number of people in the body of the



room, and more in the spectators' gallery, caught their breath and cast glances, more or less stealthy but sharply curious, to where Katherine stood, quite still, after her first involuntary movement of withdrawal, her hand on the railing, her head a little bent toward the faces below. And, having once seen, those who loved her looked away, as if they had no right to what they had surprised in the rigid stillness of her face.

Others turned to one another for corroboration. "You say she cared for him?" "Oh! passionately, my dear. I have seen her letters to him." "You see no signs of it? Oh, but that cold, regular kind of beauty is so deceptive. They say she is broken-hearted!"

Mrs. Loomis, saved from indiscretion by her distance, being seated at quite the other end of the gallery, leaned forward and began to hold Mrs. Judge Daly and Mrs. Dullas in a long, whispered conversation, which they seemed to find much more interesting than the next few speeches.

After a moment Katherine sat down in the chair behind her and leaned back out of the sight of those below.

At last the Dean arose, sole survivor, to reply to the toast of the class of '23. Every one in the gallery and in the room became suddenly very silent. He was used to such moments of tense attention when he arose to address an audience; he was used, after a moment's almost dramatic pause, to fill that silence at once with the full, thrilling tones of his beautiful voice. But to-day his first words were so feeble and faltering as to be quite inaudible. He coughed slightly, and some one



gave him a glass of water. All at once his flagging forces seemed to rally to a demand never before made in vain. His voice gradually cleared and strengthened, its tones at last quite filled the hall, so that every one could hear, every one admire.

It was only a graceful little speech of thanks and acknowledgment for the many tributes of affectionate confidence and regard which had been heaped upon him, but its dignity, its perfect good taste, its charm of eloquence, still showed with what right he was considered one of the best after dinner speakers of his time. He touched very slightly on the period of distress through which the college had been passing—had passed, he hoped, owing to the generous help of its many friends. His voice thrilled when he spoke of this crowning service, a service whose forty-eight years had seemed to him but a few days, by reason of the love he had for his alma mater—love which, while it had bidden him in the past put all his energies at her command, now made him ready, glad even, to withdraw himself, to give up his place to others as soon as he had outserved his usefulness, and his college needed him no more.

Ethel sat with the tears running down her cheeks, and made no effort to wipe them away; Katherine leaned back out of sight and covered her eyes with her hand. Every one else applauded wildly, and Sylvia herself had a flash of illumination which showed her in a new light the old Dean's almost childish obstinacy and desire for this last Commencement. She had never loved him before, but now she felt she understood. She sympathized and suffered in the thought of dis-

appointments and relinquishments whose very bitterness lay in the thought that they were among the last which would ever be demanded of him. She wanted to go to him, to touch him, to stand close beside him, to make him feel in some way her tenderness and repentance. She came upon him at last, standing in a little group of his boys on the grass under the locust trees.

He saw her at once, and addressed her, stammering somewhat over her name, for he was growing more and more inclined to confound her with all that group of slender, white robed, fair haired girls—his sisters, his wife, who was his cousin, his daughters, who had fluttered about him and stood by his side, through so many past Commencement seasons.

But Sylvia drew back with something like a return of her old resentment. The slip in her name had offended her; she felt the gulf of years lying between them too wide, her love failed again when she tried to span it. She turned away to Stephen and Jack Marston, who had hurried to join her, and did not make a part of the group who still surrounded her grandfather as he walked slowly homeward.

It was only a little way; down the smooth white path between the short, soft clover, past the offices and Professor Cochran's house, silent and deserted, with closed and shuttered windows, then beside the long, white line of the chapel, till he reached his own door, where Ethel and Katherine and her guests were waiting for him. But even here he would not go in. He stood on the low steps greeting the old alumni as they

streamed past him, calling the old fellows by their names, asking intimate questions which showed that he remembered. The younger men, those of the last ten years, came back to his memory more slowly. Here Katherine, standing by his side, had often to remind him, to supply the missing name, but he could have covered even greater lapses with his charming tact and cordial manner.

All at once some one on the edge of the crowd sang a note of the Senior song—"Farewell, fare thee well, jolly old Dean." They caught it up one after another, till at last they all were singing it—Ethel's clear soprano sustained by Franklin's sweet, high tenor piercing through and rising above the men's rougher voices, the Dean standing among them, his tall figure drawn to its full height, his bared head thrown back, too simply, charmingly pleased to care to conceal it.

Sylvia was at first pleased and excited and joined eagerly in the singing. Then as she saw the afternoon of another beautiful day beginning to die in the valley, as she felt the plaintive sadness of the recurrent minor note in the refrain, she became all at once desperately melancholy, and wished they all would stop and go away, or sing something else. She didn't want to be sad. She wanted to go on laughing and having a good time with Stephen and her cousin, Jack Marston.

"Where's Kitty?" cried Ethel at last, for the crowd was beginning to show signs of breaking up. "Gone, of course. I might have expected it. When did she ever let herself have a good time? Kitty! Mrs. Dullas is going."

Katherine appeared at once in the doorway, whiter than ever, but smiling till she saw how they still lingered, talking everything over, renewing their congratulations to the Dean. Then she turned to Richard with tears in her voice:

“If I could only get him away! He is so tired, and he needs to rest.”

“Nonsense, Kitty,” replied Ethel. “He is all right. This kind of thing isn’t going to hurt him. It will do him good.”

“Do you think so?” said Katherine almost plaintively. Her eyes were fixed on the old Dean’s face, flushed and tremulous with excitement.

At last Mr. Dullas stepped in and saved the situation by making it humorous. Every one broke into laughter and joking.

“We must go, we shall miss the train,” cried the Statesburg contingent.

“Henry, call that hack!” commanded Mrs. Dullas in her loud, full voice.

Her husband gave a lordly summons to the large barouche with its two white horses, whose driver had been lingering at a little distance, on the lookout for fares, and now hastened to drive up to the door. Mrs. Dullas then turned to her hostess, who stood inattentive, still trembling and thrilling with restrained excitement.

“You have been so good. It has been such a pleasure. And I can’t help telling you—I do sympathize with you—I do feel with you—so brave!”

Whatever she meant, her words struck Katherine breathless and silent. She looked and tried to speak,

and her manner answered the purposes of mechanical courtesy, but the expression of her eyes had sharpened to a sort of anguish, of which her face was only a trembling mark.

Mrs. Dullas did not wait to notice the effect she had produced. She and the little crowd of ladies who had come with her began to invade the hack and strain its ample capacity to bursting. The honorable Dullas himself got up beside the driver. Then they all leaned out and began to make fun of Stephen, who was refusing their pressing invitations to come too. "What are you staying for? There is nothing to keep you here any longer." But Stephen had on his perfunctory manner and laughed dully, very much relieved when the hack at last rolled off round the corner.

Katherine had already gone into the house with the Dean. Sylvia seemed hesitating, doubtful. She looked after her mother and then at Stephen, and then at the mellowing beauty of the afternoon, and the shadows of the distant woods. At last she seemed to make up her mind and sauntered off up the lane, with Stephen triumphant by her side. The rest had all strolled off in different directions. Mrs. Chandler and Marjorie, with Franklin Field beside her, could still be seen pacing under the elms of the Promenade on their way home. Ethel and Richard Porter turned together toward the South Gate.

Ethel caught her brother's arm and clung to it, for she was trembling still, almost sobbing with excitement.

"I can't bear it!" she said. "I'll never come again, never, never! It is too painful, the end of everything,



youth, happiness—the best happiness I ever had. And I had thought of coming back here to live! As if that was possible! I never want to see it again after he is gone, though it is the only place in the world I love. No, there is nothing left for me now but to go away and wander about the world, like those battered waifs with no home, nothing that belongs to them—” She broke off, not trying to conceal her agitation.

“Poor old Ethel!” said her brother soothingly. “Why don’t you come and live with me?”

But she had already recovered herself enough to answer him with friendly derision. “How long? Till you marry? No, indeed. Don’t think I am going to send my roots into any such precarious soil as that! I am better able to make something out of it now than if I were turned out in the cold again after a few pleasant years with you. After all, I am luckier than many people. I can go where I want, and do what I want. I think I shall travel round the world. But oh, why can’t people live forever! Why does everything have to grow old and change and go away?” she cried again. “I can’t bear the Dean to die.”

“There will be no one to take his place,” said Richard gravely.

“Oh, for the college, no!”

“For the college—yes.”

His sister cried out indignantly.

“I don’t mean a greater. Probably when the time comes they will have to be contented with a much smaller man. But whether it won’t be better for the college to tumble discreetly and take its place humbly



among the thousand and one second rate institutions that fill the land, instead of being forced beyond its class by a bigger man than it is."

"Richard!" cried his sister. "How can you! The place your father loved and spent his life in serving!"

Richard shrugged his shoulders. "The day of small colleges is over for the present," he remarked; "at least the kind you and the Dean believe in. Not that a small college doesn't still have its use in the world, but a use that can be better fulfilled by little men—by people like Merritt, for instance."

"Oh, well," said Ethel, assenting with renewed bitterness, "why need I care what happens now? What does it matter? At any rate, you and I have paid our obligations to it. And I shall see none of the changes—for I shall never come here again."

"And I care enough about it still," said Richard, "to be glad that it has got this boost financially to keep it going till its real estate in the valley begins to bring in something. It looks now, Ethel, as if my father was not quite so mistaken as he has been considered in advising that investment. If those men from the Grenada Steel Works buy as they are talking of doing, across the river, there will be a boom in Littelton properties, and you may be a very rich woman before you die."

Ethel shrugged her shoulders. "I am glad the college got the money now, while the Dean is here to enjoy it," she said almost indifferently. "Afterward I am going to stop caring any more for anything."

"It never would have been raised without Dullas."

"No, I suppose not. I never felt so kindly to the

Honorable Henry S. before," she answered with a certain relief at turning to lighter things. "And did you see Mrs. Dullas? Hasn't she become a dressy lady? It is amusing to watch Kitty being polite to all those people. She tries so hard, and she is so bored by them."

"Did my eyes deceive me, or did I see that pretty child of hers strolling off into the distance with the boy just now?"

"You did indeed. He is openly devoted to her, and papa and mamma Dullas are openly pleased."

"What, Tom's little daughter and one of those! Does she like him?"

"I don't know. Sylvia is a hard little thing. As for heart, I don't believe it has even begun to grow. But that is partly the way she has been brought up. Kitty is so intensely reserved about herself, and has such strained notions about the sanctity of other people's affairs, that the child herself has never had any call made upon her sympathies and intelligence for what is going on around her. Don't laugh when I tell you that a certain harmless, kindly gossip is not a bad influence in maturing and softening a child. But Sylvia is a mixture of hard precocity and extraordinary ignorance! Though she is a charming creature, and so like her father, not only in looks but in everything! She has little ways that catch at my heart, they remind me so of him."

"I don't think Tom would have liked his daughter to marry one of the Dullases," said Richard crossly.

"My dear Richard, no one knows what Tom would have liked by this time. Think what a boy he was

when he died. That seems to me one of the hardest things about it for Kitty. She hasn't even the thought of him to turn to any more. Besides—the Dullases—you needn't turn up your nose at the Dullases. They say Henry will be governor of the State some day. And they come of good stock, originally. As their position gets better they can revert more and more to their colonial ancestors and leave the middle distance, as it were, discreetly in the shade. And Stephen is really a nice fellow, a dear, sweet boy. Any girl might be glad to have him."

"I can't imagine Kitty liking it very much," said Richard, still obstinate.

"Yes, she does. She likes Stephen exceedingly. Do you call her Kitty, Richard?" concluded his sister with her usual calm indiscretion.

They had reached Miss Mix's gate as she spoke. He opened it for her and then closed it without coming in, though he leaned his arms on the top, looking across at her with a sort of whimsical amusement.

"Do I call her Kitty? That little, tender name telling of a past of petting somewhere!"

"She never got it from the Lawrences," cried Ethel sharply. "They may adore their women, but they never pet them."

"From her mother, then. Poor baby! How she must have missed her!"

"Are you coming in?" asked his sister.

"No; I am going for a walk."

"Give Kitty my love," she persisted, still teasingly. He smiled and shook his head as he turned away.

## XXVI

**D**R. LAWRENCE died on the very morning of the day that was to have been Commencement. There was no attempt at ceremony in the conferring of degrees. The graduating class got their diplomas when they called for them at the college office, and a number of them went away immediately afterward, for, of course, the Commencement ball had to be given up. But a good many stayed over to go to the funeral, which the Dean's wide connections and reputation, even more than his position as president of Littel College, made something in the nature of a public event.

Some of the more busy men among the trustees went away and came back again, like Richard Porter.

He found his sister still at Miss Mix's, lying full length in the breathless heat, for the weather had suddenly turned very warm, in the thinnest of tea-gowns, on the wide, linen-covered sofa in her room. She greeted him with enthusiasm.

"You back! How nice! Sit down in that chair by the window and I'll ring for some ice and fizzy water. I have my flask here, and I'll make you a drink."

"Not at the risk of bringing up that daughter of Belial," said Richard in his pleasant voice. "It was only by the greatest agility that I escaped her just now in the hall."

“Poor Harriet!” said Ethel, who shared the amazing tolerance all the world of Littelton showed to the rotund Miss Mix. “It is your own fault if you are thirsty. I wouldn’t let her stay.”

Richard shook his head.

“I’ll smoke if you like, but I’ll not drink on those risks.”

He sat down in a comfortable chintz arm chair near the window, where the light drifting to and fro of white curtains seemed to promise a breeze.

“Now, tell me all about it,” he said making himself comfortable. “What’s going on? Have the John Lawrences come?”

“Not till this evening. But Mrs. Bishop Pringle arrived yesterday, and Sylvia Marston this morning. Kitty wrote and asked me to meet her, so I did. She has grown so old, Richard. I rushed to the looking-glass in positive alarm as soon as I came home again. It was a little reassuring. But I wonder what she is saying about me.”

“Then of course you have seen Mrs. Lawrence?”

“Only a moment, when I went there with Sylvia Marston. You know she is frightfully busy. Everything has fallen on her to do, for John doesn’t even arrive till this evening, and young Tom is nothing but a boy. She would have liked it to be very simple, but that is quite impossible. He was connected with so many things that wish to be represented, besides the college. And the letters that have to be written! I have helped her a little in that, and of course there are plenty of people more than ready to do anything for her.

She makes use of us all to a certain extent, but at a distance. No one is really let in. She sees no one, not even Nannie or me, except for a moment in the most formal way. It hurts my feelings a little, I confess. She is so sweet and cordial and affectionate on ordinary occasions that one is deceived into thinking she really cares for one. Then comes an emergency like this, which makes her betray how perfectly she can do without any of us. Yet she tries so hard to be nice, and has the most punctilious care of everybody's feelings. Albion, for instance, gets a long list of instructions about the treatment of the faculty at the funeral, every one remembered, every one's prejudices and vanities and precedents considered and propitiated. You remember how the dear old Dean was always getting himself into trouble that way, the blood-curdling things that happened from his forgetting somebody altogether, or putting some one else in the wrong place whenever he had anything to do on occasions of ceremony? But who ever cared really? And she could have trampled on all their prejudices and set them all by the ears, and they wouldn't have minded it half as much as they do her entire independence of them, her perfect aloofness. It isn't the custom here, where every one knows everything about everybody. But that has been Kitty's way always. I wouldn't say it to any one except you, but it is little things like this in the past which have made people unfriendly to her—people to whom she has been uniformly kind—only too glad to do her a bad turn when it fell in their way. Like Harriet and those letters of hers, for instance. Oh, I forgot! Don't you know?



I didn't mean to tell you. But it doesn't matter really—besides, it's public property. Richard, did you ever imagine there was anything between her and Wilfred Cochran?"

Richard hesitated.

"When I was here last, some time ago, you remember, it was very easy to see—at least I thought then that he—in short I felt rather sorry for him."

"Oh, you needn't have felt sorry for him; at least not for that. Evidently you never seriously considered the possibility of her growing to care for him."

"To care!" echoed Richard. "There are a great many ways of caring. She was always very good to him, very much interested in him, very fond of him, if you will."

"Nonsense. You know what I mean," said Ethel impatiently. "She was in love with him."

"This is gossip, I suppose?"

"No; I saw her letters to him, written before his marriage."

"What?" said Richard.

"He had kept them, you see. His wife found them afterward among his papers and gave them to Harriet Mix. Every one has seen them."

"Cad!" said Richard through his cigar.

"No, that isn't fair. I might have said so myself if I hadn't seen. But they were read to tatters. I felt very sorry for him. He couldn't help it."

"What's become of them?" said Richard sharply.

"Oh, they came to me in the course of time, as you might imagine, and I made her give them up at once,

which she did the more readily as she was frightened out of her wits at the temper I showed. You see she rather betrayed me, surprised me into hearing parts of them. At first I didn't know at all whose they were. I was told to guess—fancy, to guess—and then there came little turns of expression, so simple, so touching, and yet so characteristic I wanted my own eyes to assure me. I sent them back to Kitty that same evening."

"And then?"

"I got a little note from her the next day, a grateful, colorless little note acknowledging them, thanking me for the trouble I took in getting them. Nothing more. Not one word, not one look. Not once since has she made the slightest allusion to it, though I have seen her every day. Oh, yes, once! Nannie exclaimed in that blundering way of hers when Harriet turned up as usual at the Dean's reception and Kitty was civil to her: 'I don't see how you can notice her, after the harm she's done you.' And Kitty caught her up. 'Oh, hardly harm, I think! Besides, she may have forgotten it when she spoke to me, and you would hardly expect me to remind her.'"

Richard gave a short laugh. His sister went on.

"You can imagine what gall and wormwood it would all be to her—I mean the publicity. How much she still really cares for him I haven't an idea. I should have thought it had been pretty well knocked out of her in the last two or three years. Any one else would be feeling it a lucky escape. He went all to pieces before he died, you know. But Kitty is different from any-

body else. There is something quite exquisite in the expression of those long blue eyes of hers nowadays—a look almost like an illumination, which comes sometimes with suffering. I am very sorry for her, though I shouldn't dare to tell her so. Poor Kitty! She doesn't care a bit for me, but she was very good to me once when I was down on my luck. No one else could have been quite so appreciative, quite so comforting. I shan't forget it. She is very sweet but very cold. I sometimes wonder whether she ever really cared even for Cochran more than to play fast and loose with him in that little way of hers, as if she couldn't help it. I have no doubt it was that as much as anything else that sent him off again. If she had gone straight ahead and married him, as he wanted her to do, I believe he would have been alive and happy at this moment."

"Well, all that is beyond my ken," said Richard easily. "I can only quote my father's monumental saying: 'I have no personal experience in the matter. To repeat what I have heard from outsiders would be gossip; to repeat what my friends themselves have confided in me would be a betrayal of trust. I must therefore beg to be excused from expressing any opinion whatever.'"

Ethel laughed.

"Are you going down with me to-morrow?" he continued. "I have to take the 12.40 to connect with the express at Statesburg."

"No; I shall stay on a day or two longer—I want to say good-by to Kitty—I don't know when I shall see her again. They may go abroad. You won't see

her at all if you dash off like that immediately after the funeral."

"I thought I would go over this afternoon. Do you think she would let me in?"

"I am sure I don't know. You might go and send in your card; that will give her a chance, if she wants to see you."

But he could not flatter himself that he was let in by anything but accident when he was ushered directly into her presence in the dark, shuttered parlor where she was standing talking to a bland faced, black coated person whose business was only too painfully evident. He saw her start of dismay as she felt herself caught unawares, and said in a great hurry: "I am going. I didn't mean to get in. I didn't expect to find you. Don't see me unless you wish."

But as soon as she recognized him, she caught at his hand and held it a moment, half unconsciously, in her desire to restrain him as he was turning away.

"Don't go, don't go, Richard," she said almost plaintively. "I want to see you."

"But you are busy," he objected.

"Only a minute." She still kept her fingers on his arm while she finished the directions she was giving, and dismissed the undertaker's man.

"I shan't stay if you don't want me," Richard assured her anxiously.

"But I do want you. I want to talk to you," she reiterated with pathetic earnestness.

It was the cry which is finally wrung from every human soul, however solitary, however unexpressive,

the anguish, the craving to be heard, to be understood, to be comforted. And Katherine turned in her extremity not to a woman, for she feared instinctively the more than understanding of the most discreet woman, her intrusions of tenderness, the keen seeing vision which never overlooks one little humiliating detail of the disintegrating effects of suffering, but traces it back to its reason, and gives it more than its meaning, the swift interpretation which takes more than is given, and breaks down the last remnant of self control when it has staggered in the agony of self revelation, yet is still struggling to regain itself.

She turned to Richard because she knew him of old and he had never disappointed her, and she trusted his sentiment for her, feeling instinctively that his tenderness, his reverence, would protect her in his very thought when she could no longer protect herself.

So he came and sat down on a little chair, while she took her place opposite against the cushions of the high backed sofa.

But for a few moments they talked of very simple things—her plans, which still depended a little on Tom's success with the West Point examinations.

"But I don't think there is much danger of his failing. Poor fellow! It has been his desire from the time he was a very little fellow, though of course it was out of the question while his grandfather wanted him here."

Then they spoke of the Dean. "Oh, I can't tell you how glad I am it ended this way!" cried Kather-

ine, almost passionately. "It is so much better than what I have been fearing day after day for so long. He wore himself out to the end, and when the time came for him to rest, to spare himself, he died, for he didn't know how. But to linger for years as his uncle did after his usefulness was over! That would have been too horrible for him—and for me," she added in a lower voice. "So for him I feel nothing but a sort of triumph that he has escaped from his enemies. For myself—oh, for myself," she added simply, "I am breaking my heart already with missing him."

Richard murmured: "He was a fine old fellow. Every one will miss him."

"Who do they put in his place?" asked Katherine, suddenly looking straight at him.

He turned his eyes away with a sort of embarrassment. "You wouldn't like to know. Don't ask me to tell you."

"Yes, I want to know. I'll have to know, Richard," she added plaintively. "Why should I mind? Who is it?"

"It is only a temporary appointment," he said at last, almost apologetically. "You see, we were in a fix. It is so hard to get one who can step right in and go to work."

"I see. Who is it?"

"Well, Judge Daly is made president pro tem.—the official head, as it were, with—it is only a temporary appointment, till they see how it works, but they have put in Merritt as acting dean."

Katherine was silent, but her face changed and stif-



fened in her effort to control her painful surprise. Then she drew a short breath and raised her eyebrows.

"After all, why should I care? Perhaps he is what they need. No doubt the trustees could find no one more suitable."

Richard laughed a little. "You are too proud even to hate your enemies," he said with amused admiration; but she answered with sudden bitterness, as if he had touched something that hurt her:

"Proud, you call me proud!" and sat a moment silent, looking out in front of her with strained, melancholy eyes. Then she began:

"You may have heard. People have been very much interested in my affairs lately. I have been very much pitied, I believe, by my friends and neighbors——"

"Don't say anything more about it," said Richard hastily. "It is nobody's business but your own."

"But I want to talk to you about it," said Katherine wistfully. "I want to tell you, Richard. I thought, oh, I was very sure, for I hadn't wanted to believe it, and the assurance came at last with a sort of agony—but I thought I loved him; and through it all I thought that, oh, nearly to the end, but the last seems to have burned it away. And that is the worst of all—that I wasn't able to bear it to the end. It was of too poor stuff to last through adversity."

"It isn't so. You misjudge yourself," said Richard in a great hurry. "All love can't be put to the same usage. You aren't made for brutal usage or hu-

miliation or any of the other results of degrading vices. It would kill you, that's all."

She looked at him wistfully. "But other women have stood those tests."

"Don't talk to me about other women," he exclaimed in sudden rage. "You don't know anything about them. It is you we are thinking about, and you have every right to resent what you have been made to suffer. You are too fine for it. Do you understand?"

"And do you think that makes me more valuable?" she asked with a little, sad smile; then continued, with a sudden rush of feeling: "But, Richard, I did understand. I did care, I did forgive him. I was deeply pitiful—more—it made me hardly feel the need of excuses for him for everything but this last. But, Richard, knowing her, knowing himself, knowing all I might have been exposed to, how could he, how could he go away and not destroy those letters!"

Richard looked fixedly at the end of his boots. "I don't know," he answered rather feebly.

But she went on, hardly conscious of him, following the train of her own thoughts.

"It was never easy. I never got over the feeling that it was an outrage for me to care again. But I know my own weaknesses. I have an unfortunate reserve. It isn't quite voluntary, but it keeps the people I love best from ever knowing how much I care for them. Such things add unnecessary bitterness to death," she added in a lower tone. "I thought I had learned that. So I said more—not more than I felt—"

she trembled a little in the bare truth of her revelation—"but more than I wished, more than I ever thought I could. And he was very good to me, very generous, and infinitely patient, so that when I knew, myself, it seemed only fair to him. And my father-in-law was so fond of him, so dependent on him. There seemed so much to recommend it." But in a moment she added almost fiercely: "No, there was nothing to recommend it! Nothing but danger in it! For me—that didn't matter—but for every one connected with me. I had no right. It was not my own risk. I was mistaken—I was—but you, Richard, you find excuses for me. Can you tell me why I should be punished so unmercifully?"

She looked at him with a sort of anguished question in her beautiful, shrinking eyes, but he was staring the other way, frowning a little, and veiling his light eyes behind his lighter eyelashes. She fell back into her old attitude, her chin in her hand, looking widely out before her, speaking half to herself.

"Nothing has been spared me to make it intolerable, all my weaknesses, the little things on which I prided myself. And now my letters. You may say why should I mind? I have done nothing to be ashamed of. But I do mind, Richard; I am not without fortitude, I can bear a good deal. I have borne things in the past, you know, without complaining."

Richard gave a little inarticulate murmur of assent.

"But this I cannot bear! No, I cannot bear it! If I had had to go on living here I should have become one of those strange creatures who hide themselves

between four walls, shrinking from the light and the sight of their fellow creatures."

She covered her eyes with her hand, clasping her fingers across her brows and holding them there while she went on talking.

"At any minute, when I might be least expecting it, there always can come that look, that pitying, prying look, to remind me that they think they hold the key. I never used to care much, though their gossiping, slanderous tongues often did their best to hurt us. But now, somehow, I feel myself at their mercy. Every one, my own servants, Sylvia——"

"Oh," said Richard, "how could she know?"

Katherine looked up with restrained bitterness.

"What scruple of delicacy do you think there may be among my—my neighbors to keep them from telling Sylvia all she chooses to listen to about her mother? Oh, no! It is not my imagination. Sylvia knows enough—I can never go into explanations with her, so I shall never know exactly what form the—the story took for her ears—and Tom, of course. It was Tom, in fact, who was chosen to bring me back my letters."

"Damn their stupidity!" said Richard under his breath.

"Oh, no! It does not really matter—I should have imagined it if I had not known it. Besides, he scarcely ever thinks of it. But I see it in Sylvia's eyes every time she looks at me. No doubt I deserve it. I had no right to the feeling they both had for me."

"What nonsense," said Richard almost roughly. "You have a right to everything most perfect and de-

voted, and if your daughter doesn't adore you she is not worthy of—of her father," he concluded rather abruptly.

Katherine put her hand over her eyes again.

"I know. I am probably exaggerating it all," she said under her breath. "I always feel that possibility in myself. But you are right in saying there are some things killed of hard usage. There are things in myself that are being killed—good things. For instance, I am cruel to Sylvia."

"Oh, no," said Richard.

"Yes; but I cannot help it. She is always trying to come too near, and it hurts me—no doubt she has a right to demand explanations from me. I ought not to mind giving them. It is nothing I am ashamed of. But I cannot—no, that is one thing I can never discuss with her. It would be too insulting to us both," she added with restrained vehemence.

"I don't believe she wants explanations," said Richard easily. Then he drew a long breath, moved a little on his chair and changed his tone.

"And speaking of Sylvia, what is this I hear about her and that long legged young jackanapes, Henry Dullas's son?"

"Oh," said Katherine with a sudden return of natural interest. "Yes, I believe people have been connecting their names together. It is more serious than most student attachments, because, young as he is, he is in a position to marry. But they are both such children. How can they know their own minds?"

"Such children, are they?" Richard looked at her,

a smile and a tone in his slow, pleasant voice that made her draw her brows together, half in amusement, half in annoyance.

“At any rate it has come to nothing yet.”

“Nothing,” echoed Richard. “Then that is your daughter’s fault rather than the young man’s. I myself was an involuntary onlooker on that interesting occasion.”

“Richard, you are joking! When did you see Sylvia with Stephen and without me?”

“The afternoon of the dinner, in the woods behind the college pasturage, in a certain little winding path by the brook, which leads to a certain seat under a stone bridge. I think you know them both well.”

He wouldn’t go on till she had acknowledged him with a little, painful smile, though the things his words were meant to recall had in themselves nothing painful.

But she returned quickly to the subject of her anxiety.

“Oh, that afternoon! I don’t remember. It might very well have been. Tell me about it.”

“I had been wandering off by myself, revisiting some of my old haunts, and I was sitting—just in the same place and the same way I sat, oh, too many years ago, and looked down the path and saw you and Tom coming along together the first time I ever met you. Well, now it was Sylvia and young Dullas. You know where the bars come that lead into the pasture?”

Katherine nodded silently.

“Well, they stopped there. I could see them plainly, though of course I couldn’t hear—it was not



necessary, I didn't even have to imagine it. I could supply it all from my own experience. He is a good looking fellow enough. At first he seemed inclined to bluster—I don't believe he has received many rebuffs in his life. But she was evidently quite merciless. She is still too young to feel much compunction for the wounds she makes, and for that reason she is probably the less dangerous."

He paused again till he made Katherine look at him and smile a little.

"At the end he was quite pathetically cast down; I really found it in my heart to pity him, as he went striding off through the deep grass of the pasture, leaving her looking out after him, with her elbows on the bars. After a decent time I joined her, and we walked home together, making no reference whatever, either of us, to what we both were thinking about."

"Oh," said Katherine, with a certain relief in her tone, "that is what Stephen must mean by the note I got from him. He begs me to forgive him and wants to see me. He has broken his promise not to speak to Sylvia without telling me beforehand. Poor boy! He asks to come this afternoon."

"Well, I call that indecent of him," said Richard crossly.

"Oh, no! It is Stephen. He is very self absorbed, very much set on his own desires. He is apt to overlook other things. But he is a dear boy. It is hard to tell exactly how he will turn out, but he has qualities which would make a woman very happy if she was a little merciful to him."

"I believe you are sorry for him. You would help him if you can. You are a match maker, like the rest of them. You would like your daughter to marry him."

He spoke half in fun, but she turned upon him almost fiercely.

"Richard, how can you say such things even in joke! I want Sylvia to marry anybody! Is there any one else left now in the world for me but her? But of course that wouldn't make any difference if they loved one another. They will be separated now for a little while," she went on more gently, "but if he chooses to wait and if she cares, what can I do but help them?"

"You must be glad to get away," he said.

She sat a moment silent, but answered at last, sighing.

"Yes, I don't think I could bear to go on living here. As one grows older every new loss must have some of its roots in the old, but this seems to bring it back again from the very beginning. I miss Tom, for instance, everywhere, almost as I did at first. I shall be glad to leave this house."

"And go back to your own people and your own places," said Richard comfortably. "You will be glad to see them all."

She responded with almost pathetic eagerness: "Oh, yes! Ruth has cabled that she won't leave Paris till we join her. It seems almost like a dream to think of being there again. There has never been a spring that I haven't been homesick to see it again, its fountains and lilacs in the flower-market by the Madeleine,

and the soft little breeze, full of the perfume of the lime trees in the Faubourg gardens and fresh with the wet wood pavement."

"You have never got over anything," said Richard in a sort of amazement.

She answered with a sad, half scornful smile.

"You think so? I seem to myself to have been a very poor thing for constancy." Then as he rose to go: "Give my love to Ethel. I never can thank her for what she did for me. But perhaps she understands. I am very fond of Ethel."

"She hopes to see you again before she goes."

"Yes, oh yes. But not you?"

"No; I leave to-morrow at noon."

She rose at last and held out her hand to him.

"You have been very good to me. I can't be grateful enough. Life had got to be a kind of anguish almost intolerable, and you have made it possible again. You have restored its values to me. No one need tell me that I make a great part of my own suffering. I know it too well already. It is a weakness to be hurt all the time as I am, by—by instinct, as it were," she concluded with a melancholy little laugh. "But I do try to live simply and normally, to keep things in their proper proportions, even when I fail. I am not made to find life very easy."

He took both her hands and bent over them, saying with a kind of extravagant tenderness: "It is not your fault. You have never found anything in life good enough for you. There is no one in the world worthy even to tie your shoe."

She received his leave taking with affectionate amusement.

“You are always so good to me, Richard. I have ceased to wonder why.”

In the hall they found Stephen, pale and anxious, speaking solemnly to Molly.

“May I see you? May I see you just a moment?” he said, starting toward Katherine as soon as she appeared at the parlor door.

She received him kindly, even while sending across his shoulder a little deprecating smile at Richard taking his departure.

## XXVII

I HAVE no right. I oughtn't to come, but I can't stay away and have you think things about me without trying to make you understand," cried the young man clamorously, as he found himself alone with her in the darkened parlor.

"What things, Stephen? Sit down and tell me quietly. I have been thinking nothing disagreeable about you."

"Hasn't Sylvia told you?"

Katherine smiled and shook her head.

He dropped down on the sofa and buried his face on the high cushioned arm.

"She doesn't care for me—she doesn't care for me at all. And she says she never will," he groaned despairingly. "Don't be angry with me for breaking my promise. I didn't mean to, but a man can't always help himself."

"I know, poor boy," answered Katherine, with the facile feminine forgiveness which is not so much merciful to weakness as recognizant of strength. "I am very sorry for you. I wish I could do anything to comfort you."

He raised his pallid, boyish face, still pitiful in the pained surprise of his first defeat.

"But aren't you going to help me?"

Katherine could hardly keep from smiling at the very simplicity of his appeal.

"How can I help you, dear boy?" she asked, almost amused.

"You have so much influence over her. I am sure if you talked to her you could make her see it a little differently. You might persuade her to give me another chance."

Katherine was sitting in Richard's low chair, her elbow on the back, her head leaning back against her hand.

"Dear Stephen, is that the way you want to win a woman?" she said almost reproachfully. "I thought you had better stuff in you."

"Well, what shall I do then?" he said, moving forward to the edge of the sofa that he might be as near as possible, his head hung down, his elbows on his knees, while his fingers reached for and obtained a fold of her dress, which he held through the conversation as if he found comfort in that small contact.

"Are you sure you care so much for her that you won't get over it after a little while, when you don't see her any longer? Remember, she is not the first person you have thought you were in love with."

"She is the first person I ever really was in love with—the first person I ever wanted to marry—and the last. If I don't get Sylvia I will never marry any one else." Then, seeing her smile not quite concealed: "There have been men who have only loved one woman in their lives."

"A few, perhaps," she replied politely.



"You have no reason for thinking I may be one of them," he concluded triumphantly. But his voice dropped quickly to despair again. "I can't give her up. It would break my heart never to see her again. And you are going to take her away, and she will forget all about me. I know I could make her love me if I had another chance."

"Dear Stephen, you still have as much chance as other men," said Katherine gently. "She is very young, and very cold. She is not likely to care for any one for some time. If you are willing to wait, if you still have the same mind when you are both a little older, there is no reason why you shouldn't try again with more success."

"She's so pretty; no one else can help falling in love with her as soon as they see her. Some one will be sure to cut me out."

There was a moment's silence which he broke.

"Say they won't. Say you won't let them. Say I may come this summer and see you if I go to Europe."

He hitched himself forward on the sofa till his head nearly lay against her arm.

But she sent him back to his place with friendly firmness. He obeyed, half laughing, then grew serious, more deeply, gravely serious than he had ever been before.

"I know I behave like a goose," he began in quite a different tone. "I am always making a fool of myself, only fit to be laughed at. But now I mean what I say. I am not worthy of her. I am glad she turned me down. But I shall be—I shall make myself so, and

I'll never give her up, never, not even if she marries another man. I never knew what it was to care for anything before. It makes me feel as if there was something inside me coiled up like a spring. I don't know what it is, but it is too strong to be beaten."

Katherine looked at him with a certain respect as she watched this new initiation of his natural, petted, clamorous inclination into masculine persistency, and she fitted her manner at once to his new dignity.

He stayed some time longer, for Stephen was not one of those persons satisfied with the first saying of a thing. But he went at last, having obtained certain promises and concessions. His voice broke as he said good by.

"You are the best, the kindest, the dearest—and I a brute, a pig. I'd like to kick myself for the way I have behaved to you."

But Katherine checked him almost sharply. "I thought we had decided, Stephen, that you have not behaved so very badly." He stood silent, realizing half shyly that there are some things for which one must never ask forgiveness. Then very humbly he kissed her hand as he went away, not ceremoniously, but as if it was the only way he knew by which he could confess his deep affection and contrition.

## XXVIII

**S**YLVIA'S reserves with Stephen's secret had not been entirely voluntary. For a little while, indeed, shaken, almost frightened by the seriousness of their interview, which had left her with a vague, childish feeling of guilt and fear of blame, she had wished to be silent, and when she was ready to turn to her mother, that very day, Katherine could not listen to her, for that very day, in strange conclusion to its many incidents, her grandfather died. Since then the greater had swallowed up the less—not for her, however. Personally she had little sense of loss in her grandfather's death, and for that very reason the weariness, the tedium, the inaction of mourning shut her in more painfully to her own perplexities. As time passed she found herself growing gradually starved with longing to speak, to hear counsel, to confide her own growing unhappiness to the person who had never before been so inattentive to the least little crisis of her life.

But Katherine sat all day apparently unconscious of her need, writing at her little table, or she was closeted for hours with people on business, and very soon Sylvia's unknown, black clothed relations began to fill the house, taking Katherine's place at table, encroaching upon her time at meals or in the evening.

"My dear Katherine," said John somewhat pom-

pously on the first evening of his arrival, "can you spare me some time after tea? You know more than any one else about my father's papers. There are some things I must consult you about before I see his lawyer to-morrow."

Her sisters-in-law broke out in chorus against him.

"Don't let him tire you, Kitty. You look perfectly exhausted already. There is no reason why you should be worried with all this business in addition to everything else."

But she put aside their objections.

"I am not tired at all. Let us go up into my sitting room, John."

Sylvia, used to the restraints of demonstration Katherine usually imposed on those about her, never got over her surprise at the docility with which she now submitted to causeless embraces.

"Good-night, you dear child," they all exclaimed, with kisses, as they saw her go from among them.

Then by common consent avoiding the parlor as too near the closed door of the Dean's study, they all drifted off to their own rooms.

Tom had already slipped away as soon as he could, after tea, followed by Sylvia's regretful eyes. He was still permitted to go out and mingle with the world and shake off for a moment, at least, the incubus that vicarious grief was imposing on them both. "But everything is made easier for boys," said Sylvia to herself bitterly.

Her Aunt Christine, the oldest of the family, carried her away with her into her own room. She was

the widow of a Western bishop, a tall, slender, fair woman with yellow hair not yet gray, and only partly covered by the little triangular piece of muslin which she wore as a widow's cap. They sat a long time together in the dark because it was cooler without a lamp. Sylvia could see her aunt's figure dimly evident through the obscurity, in her chair by the window, and listened intermittently to the soft murmur of her voice, which came to her dimly, half escaping through the window beside her, penetrated by the rhythmic creaking of her feather fan and the noise a great brown beetle was making round the light in the hall. She was telling of Sylvia's father.

"Dear child, you make my heart ache, you remind me so of him, far more than your brother. Tom was the youngest of us all, and my mother was so glad it was a boy, that he could have the family name. You know there had been a Thomas—the eldest—who died of scarlet-fever, and we none of us could make enough of the last baby. He would have been spoiled among us if he hadn't had such a lovely nature. As it was, the petting he got only gave more confidence to his charming, merry ways. I can never forget the peculiar crash he used to give the front door when he came home, even from the shortest absences, and his gay voice sounding through the house from the bottom of the stair. He always took that way of finding where we were before he went in search of us, always so eager to tell his adventures, so sure of our interest. Your mother never quite got used to his almost boyishly demonstrative manner. We used to laugh at her for



being so shy with him before us all. His death nearly broke my heart. None of the others could take the same place with me.

"Your Uncle John is, of course, a man of parts. He was always more distinguished looking than Tom, more generally agreeable, one might say. He is still a very handsome man, though it is a pity he is growing so bald. But his wife spoils him. He has become very tiresome and long winded. It is not good for the men of our family to be too much given way to. They are better for being taken down, their vanity kept in check. It would have been far better for John if he had stayed in the East and married dear Ethel Porter, as we all wished."

"But I thought it was she who wouldn't marry him," said Sylvia a little shyly.

"Hm," said her Aunt Christine. "Poor Ethel has her weaknesses, and one of them is a great deal of silly, stubborn pride, which no doubt was rather an obstacle at one time; but there is no doubt that she was deeply attached to him, and if he had had a little more pertinacity—her obstinacy hurt his vanity, and that was a thing he could never forgive."

Her mother and uncle were still talking in Katherine's sitting room when Sylvia went by on her way to bed. She stopped a moment at the door and looked in upon them. Katherine was sitting in a characteristic attitude, one elbow resting on her desk front, her head tilted back and sideways against her hand, the other hand stretched out and resting on the arm of her chair. The light of the lamp behind her outlined one



cheek and part of her profile, and made a dim brightness of her hair. John's face showed more directly in the circle of illumination, high colored and handsome, with its fine, blue eyes and well-arched brows, and brown hair running back from the temples. He was talking earnestly in the fine, rolling voice which was so like his father's.

"Good night," said Sylvia rather drearily, and made them both look up.

Her uncle interrupted himself to answer with forced amiability, "Good night, my dear," evidently impatient to have her gone again; but Katherine held her a moment.

"Are you going so soon? Isn't it still very early?"

"I have a headache," answered Sylvia a little shamefacedly.

"The heat, I suppose," said her uncle. "A good night's rest will cure it. Then you would have me understand, my dear Katherine—" He returned to his subject, drawing his sister-in-law with him.

And Sylvia went away slowly to her own room; but she couldn't sleep. After what seemed to her a long time she heard Katherine come into the next room, which was her bedroom, and close the door between them. Sylvia listened in breathless suspense, listened and waited, hoping against hope that when her mother was ready for bed the door would be opened again, and that Katherine, finding her now awake, as often before through her excitable little girlhood, would come in and talk to her and find the reason of her

sleeplessness, and bring her comfort by the mere contact of soft hands upon her burning temples.

At last the fine thread of light filtering under the sill went out suddenly; the lamp had been extinguished on the other side, but there was no corresponding movement toward the door. On the contrary, all remained dark and still. She flung herself back on her pillows in a passion of stifled weeping.

Then the door opened at last. She heard her mother speak to her.

" Sylvia, are you awake? "

She gave a gasping assent.

" Are you crying, my dearest? " said Katherine then, in sudden anxiety. In another moment she was close beside her, leaning toward her in the darkness. " Tell me what is the matter? "

" My head aches, " said Sylvia in stifled tones.

" Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you call me? "

" The door was shut, " said Sylvia with a great sob. " I thought you couldn't hear. "

" Let me get something to help the pain. "

But Sylvia caught her hand and held her fast. " Oh, no, don't go. I only want you. " She put up her arms and drew herself back into her old, childish attitude, her head on her mother's shoulder, her lips pressed against the sweet, white curves of her throat.

" Was it the pain that made you cry? " asked Katherine with infinite tenderness.

" No, no. It was because I was so unhappy. I wanted you so much, and there was always somebody

else, and I don't see how it will ever be different. When we go away there will be Aunt Ruth and a lot of people you care for. We shall never be together, just you and I, again."

"Oh, yes, dear, many, many times together, just you and I."

Sylvia sighed. "It will never be the same again," she whispered.

"Why not? Are you sorry to go away from here?"

"Oh, no! oh, no! It is worse here than anywhere else. You won't let me tell you," said Sylvia under her breath.

She was so near, her head lay so close to her mother's heart, that she could feel the thrill and shiver of half involuntary withdrawal, and caught at her with a sort of desperation.

"O mamma, don't go away! Don't be angry. I won't—I won't say anything. I'll never speak to you about anything you would rather not."

"Poor baby," said her mother, almost laughing, "I'm not angry. I'm not going away. See, I am close here, holding you fast. Don't be afraid to talk to me of anything you want, if it will make you happier."

But the graciousness of her tone failed her before the end, and Sylvia, from her soft place, could feel the barriers lying like iron between them. She moved a little restlessly in the silence that followed, then with childish instinct flung herself against the weak place in her mother's fortifications.

"I was so wretched," she said at last, very low.

"But why, Sylvia?" asked Katherine somewhat coldly. "I have often wanted to ask you. There is nothing to make you wretched now."

"Yes, there is," said Sylvia innocently. "Why not, when it is you and the way you feel?"

"I," said Katherine faintly.

"Yes; I can't bear to think you are unhappy."

Katherine drew a sigh of desperate patience before she answered slowly: "I am not so very unhappy, dear; not at all so that it leaves nothing else. When you grow older you will learn how quickly the little joys of life reassert themselves. You must never think of me as perfectly miserable."

"Yes?" said Sylvia wistfully. Then with a sudden movement to draw herself away from her mother's arms, she added with passionate bitterness: "After all, I suppose the real thing that makes me wretched is knowing that you don't need me or care for me very much, and nothing can cure that."

"What do you mean, Sylvia," said her mother sternly.

She hid her face.

"Oh, I don't suppose you will understand," she said, hesitating; "I can't make you. It is not the reason you think—at least, that only showed me what had been all the time, only I didn't know it. I don't mean that I minded your caring for—" Sylvia hesitated, and then hurried, stammering, on through Katherine's dead silence—"for somebody else. But, you see, all the time I didn't know I thought I was so close to you, and as soon as I found out and might have comforted

you—you put me far away out in the cold with all the others. If you had cared for me you would have wanted me a little, wouldn't you?" She stopped, almost frightened at the effect of her words on her mother's intrenched composure.

"Not care, not want you?" cried Katherine breathlessly. The shock of her surprise betrayed her suddenly into passionate sobbing.

"Please don't, mamma," said Sylvia much distressed. "I wouldn't have told you if I had thought you would mind so much."

"But why did you think that? How could you think that?" Katherine reiterated, still struggling with her sobs. "It is unjust, unkind, I—I didn't deserve that."

"Oh, dear mamma! I never thought you didn't care for me really, as your child. It was something more I meant, like friends, you know. I can't explain and it doesn't matter," she added hastily, as she felt Katherine catch her breath again. "I am quite content to be your child when you are good to me, as you are now."

"Good to you!" echoed Katherine very low, still holding Sylvia close in her arms. "My little friend," she added after a moment in a sort of passionate humility: "It was not you who were silly, but I who was stupid and blind and cruel. You must forgive me, and I will try to be more worthy of your friendship in future, but you will have to be patient with me, for, as you come to know me better, you will find me a very poor thing in almost all relations."

Sylvia clung to her desperately. "Please don't. Please don't say horrid things about yourself. If being friends means that, I'd rather not. I want you just to be perfect, as you always were. I'll try to be good, I'll try to be a comfort to you."

"Don't be too good to me, dear," said Katherine a little faintly. "Don't learn to spare me too quickly. I am afraid I like the other way best. And now," with a sudden change of tone, "suppose we don't talk about me any more just now. Do you know when I first came in I had an idea that you were going to tell me about something quite different. Stephen came to see me this afternoon while you were in the garden with Marjorie."

"Oh, did he, and did he tell you? Do you think I was very heartless, mamma?"

"Heartless, dear! Weren't you kind to him?"

"Oh, yes! At first I laughed a little because I thought he was half in fun. But it was horrid as soon as I saw he really cared. He minded, dear mamma—he cried—he minded so much," said Sylvia with a sort of awe.

"And so you said no, Sylvia," said her mother gravely. "Why did you say no?"

"Oh, because I don't care for him now," said Sylvia simply. "It is funny, because at first, a long time ago, I cared for him a great deal. He made that queer little feeling come in my heart when I thought I was going to see him. You know that feeling! It comes when you like a person very much."



But Katherine sat silent, with her cheek on Sylvia's hair, waiting for her to go on.

"And I felt dreadfully once, for quite a while, when some one said he was in love with that Miss Winston in Statesburg. And though it hasn't been so exciting since I got to know him so well and saw him all the time, still I did think I cared for him very much, and I often used to imagine what fun it would be when we were engaged."

"You did, Sylvia, and you never told me!" said her mother in amazement.

"O mamma, one can't tell those things. They would sound ridiculous. And then I thought it would be such fun to be married very soon. You see I always wanted to be as much like you as possible."

"You wanted to be like me!" echoed Katherine with a sort of pathetic wonder.

"Yes. It was silly of me, for I know I could never be half so beloved."

Katherine drew her closer with a little cry of desperate amusement.

"Then what made you change your mind so that you said no when the time came?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Sylvia a little restlessly. "I don't think I really care for any one—but you, and yet I am not sure. I wish he hadn't been so very unhappy! When he—when he cried, I felt I couldn't bear it. I can't bear to think of it now. Do you think he will ever get over it?"

"Do you want him to get over it?" asked her mother.

Sylvia hesitated. "I suppose he will," she said reluctantly. "People do get over things, don't they—almost everything, if they only go on living long enough?"

"Not always," said Katherine under her breath, while Sylvia continued in a tone of forced cheerfulness: "Yes, I can't imagine Stephen unhappy very long."

"Do you want him to come and see you this summer if he goes abroad and Aunt Ruth asks him?"

"Shan't I see him before?" said Sylvia in innocent dismay.

Her mother laughed a little. "I thought you had sent him away."

"Yes," said Sylvia doubtfully, adding after a moment, "if he only were a little different. If only people didn't laugh at him, and call him 'poor Stephen,' and say he has a good heart. I don't want only a good heart—at my age, mamma."

Katherine gave a little sigh of laughter. "Perhaps some day he will have more, perhaps you will want less. In the mean time we won't send him quite away, shall we, dear? We will ask him to come and say good-by before we go."

"Yes," said Sylvia with a long sigh. Then with her arms close about her mother's neck, her cheek pressed against her shoulder: "But I don't believe I shall ever love any other person in the world quite as much as I do you."

Katherine sat a long time in the darkness even after Sylvia had ceased to talk, even after her soft, regular

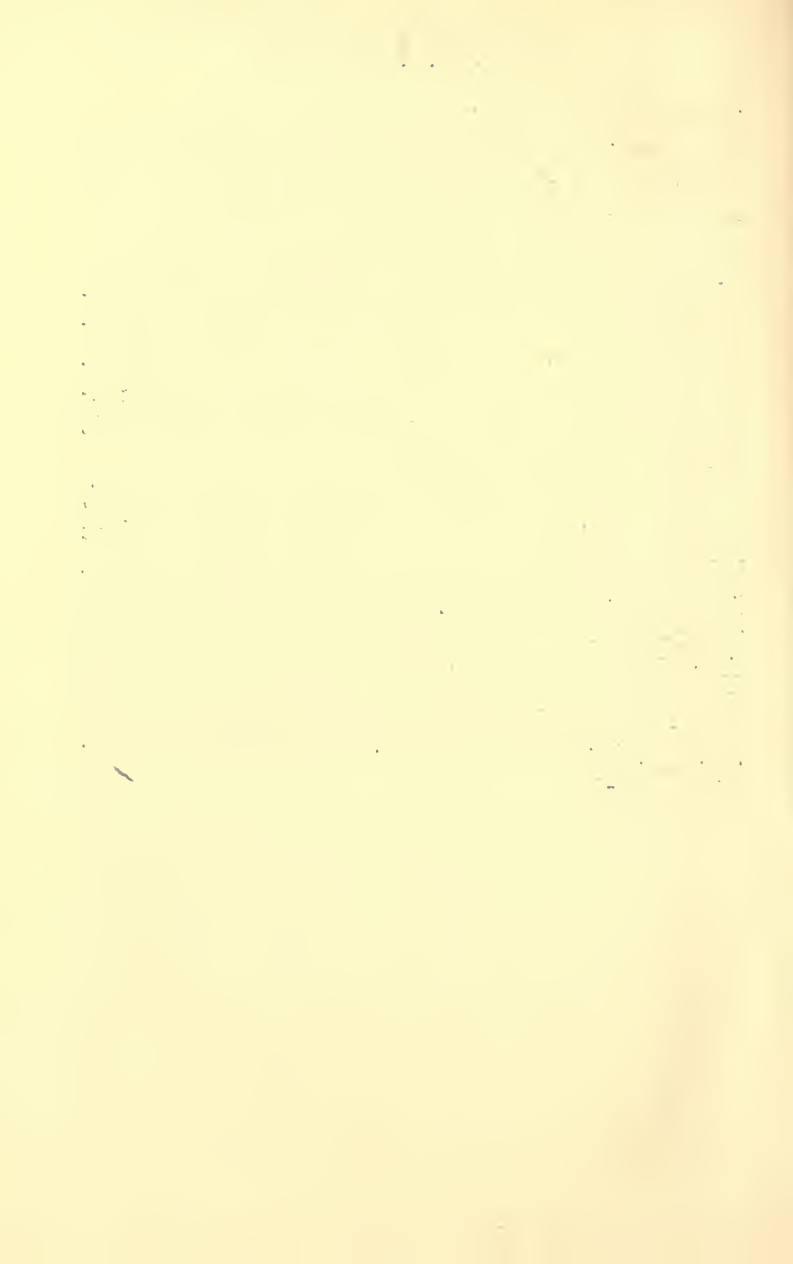
breathing as she lay against her mother's shoulder told that she had fallen asleep. At last she disengaged herself, letting her little daughter sink softly back among the pillows. Even then Sylvia only half awoke to say good night in sleepy tones, with half opening eyes.

Katherine returned to her own room, though not just yet to sleep, but went and sat by the window, leaning her arms on the cool stone sill and looking out across the soft darkness of grass on the athletic field to the gray building of the engineering school, the blank glass of whose shutterless windows was sending but dim reflections into the night. She watched, as she had done a hundred times before in hours of sleepless despair, the moon rising higher and higher above the squat library tower into the airy zenith, darkening the long line of the Alban Hills which glimmered through the arches of the classic elms. And the past, so often bitter, did not make the thought less sad that the time was coming when she would look out on these familiar precincts no more. Places one has learned to know through tears have their own beauty, bring their own nostalgia, often more far reaching and poignant than those associated only with joy.

But as she gazed, at the other end of the campus round the school of engineering there emerged on the whiteness of the Promenade certain dark, batlike figures, to flutter awhile among the loops of the elms before they disappeared again among the gray buildings. Their voices came harshly through the night, with greater distinctness as they approached the Dean's corner. Here they paused, turned and walked along

the path which led under Katherine's window, past the long line of the chapel, to the empty house beyond. There they stood, darkly in the moonlight, looking up and at each other with pointing, curious gestures. It was Mr. and Mrs. Brauer, who were walking to the South Gate with Miss Mix, and the new professor of engineering and his wife, whom they had been entertaining at their evening meal. They had all turned a little from their path in order to show the new members of the faculty the house which had belonged to his predecessor and was now his.

Katherine drew back softly and closed the blind, shutting it all away, the silvering walls, the straight enclosures, the distance of the Alban Hills, and the great white moon riding high in the June heaven—the frame of her life, happy and sorrowful, for more than nineteen years. But she could not quite exclude the sound of the voices as they passed again beneath her windows, and it was a long time before their echoes let her sleep.



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